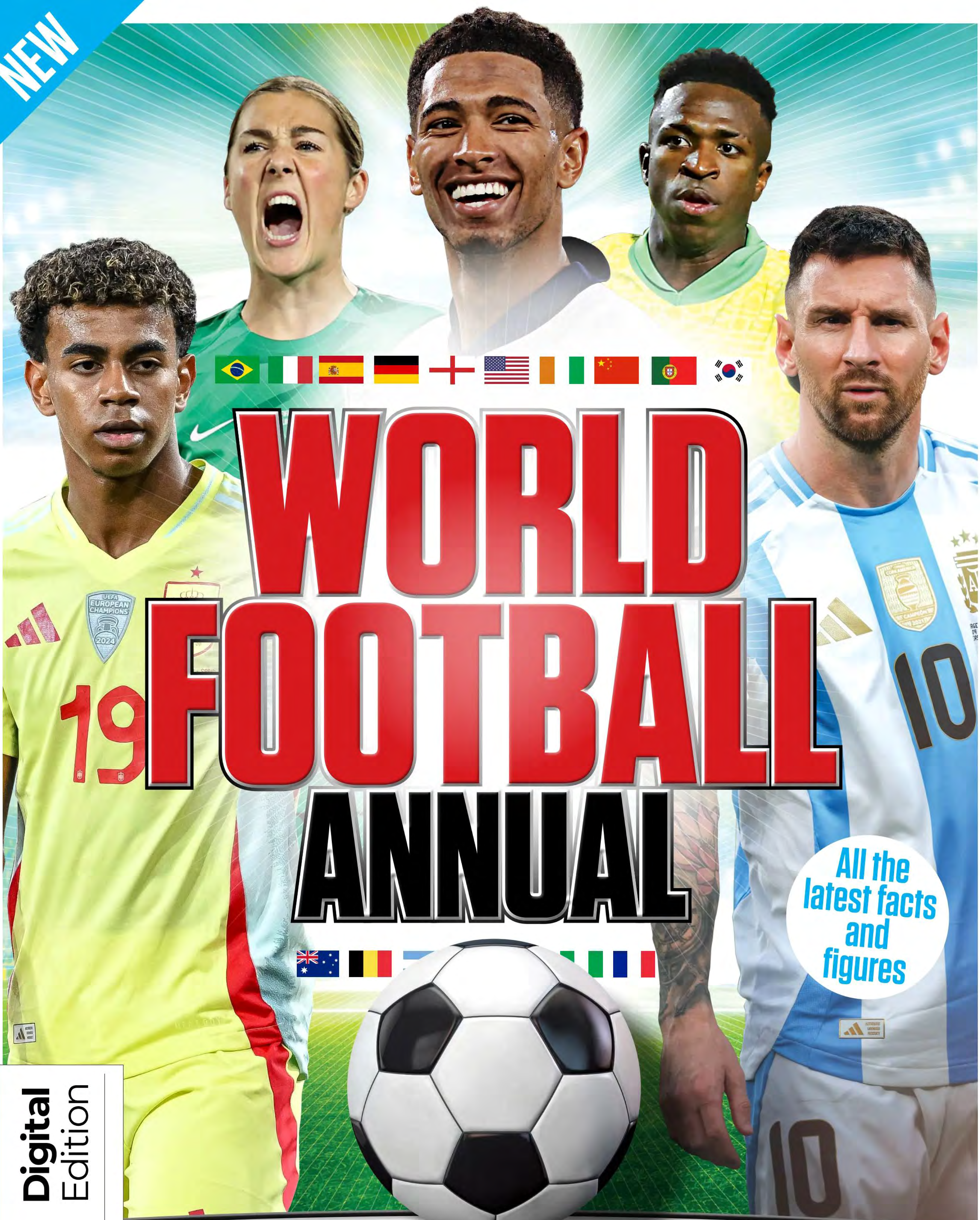
NEW

WORLD FOOTBALL ANNUAL



All the latest facts and figures

THE ULTIMATE BOOK OF FOOTBALL STATS & RECORDS

Digital Edition

FUTURE

ELEVENTH EDITION

WORLD FOOTBALL ANNUAL

The world of international football is filled with drama. From heroic team performances to displays of individual brilliance and unlikely underdogs to all-conquering juggernauts, the beautiful game has provided more than a century of incredible sporting stories. In this new edition of the **World Football Annual** we delve into the records and stories from across the global game and revisit some of the most iconic football moments in history. You'll read up on history's greatest major tournament performances, including Pele's Brazil, Lionel Messi inspiring La Albiceleste to a third World Cup crown in Qatar, and Spain winning a record fourth European Championship. We'll tour the world and break down the legendary players and seminal victories from each nation, as well as counting down their top scorers and appearance record holders. Enjoy!



FUTURE

WORLD FOOTBALL ANNUAL

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Dan Peel**
Compiled by **Charles Ginger & Stephen Williams**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**

Written by
Kier Radnage & Charles Ginger

Cover images
Alamy Images, Getty Images

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely, Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman**

Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk – For enquiries, please email:
mfcommunications@futurenet.com

The content in this book was previously published in the Welbeck book entitled: World Football Annual

World Football Annual Tenth Edition (SBZ4836)

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION 3

PART 1: FIFA WORLD CUP 8

FIFA World Cup: Qualifiers 10
FIFA World Cup: Team Records 12
FIFA World Cup: Goalscoring 16
FIFA World Cup: Appearances 20
FIFA World Cup: Goalkeeping 24
FIFA World Cup: Managers 26

PART 2: THE COUNTRIES 28

Europe 30
England 32 **France** 36
Germany 40 **Italy** 44
Netherlands 48 **Spain** 52
Belgium 56 **Bulgaria** 60
Croatia 62 **Czech Republic** 64
Denmark 66 **Greece** 68
Hungary 70 **Northern Ireland** 72
Norway 74 **Poland** 76
Portugal 78 **Republic of Ireland** 80
Romania 82 **Russia** 84
Scotland 86 **Serbia** 88
Slovakia 90 **Sweden** 92
Switzerland 94 **Turkey** 96
Ukraine 98 **Wales** 100
Other Teams Europe 102

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL 106

South America 110

Argentina 112 **Brazil** 116

Chile 120 **Uruguay** 122

Other Teams South America 124

Africa 126

North Africa: FIFA World Cup Records 128

North Africa: National Records 130

Sub-Saharan Africa: FIFA World Cup Records 132

Sub-Saharan Africa: National Records 134

Asia & Oceania 136

Australia 138 **Japan** 140 **South Korea** 142

Other Teams Asia 144 **Oceania** 150

CONCACAF 152


Mexico 154 **United States** 156

CONCACAF Other Teams 158



PART 1: FIFA WORLD CUP
ALL-TIME RECORDS

The 2022 Qatar World Cup started ominously for Lionel Messi and Argentina. In a campaign that would ultimately end in glory for the game's greatest player and tournament appearance-holder, Lionel Scaloni's men fell to a stunning 2-1 opening defeat to minnows Saudi Arabia. But Messi refused to be denied for a fifth time, and through a series of mercurial performances (and coolly taken penalties) he helped Argentina to navigate a route to the final – and what a final it was. Deadlocked at 3-3 after extra time, France and Argentina faced the lottery of penalties. Showing their customary steel under pressure, Argentina won the shootout 4-2 to claim the country's third World Cup.




PAREDES
5

FIFA WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

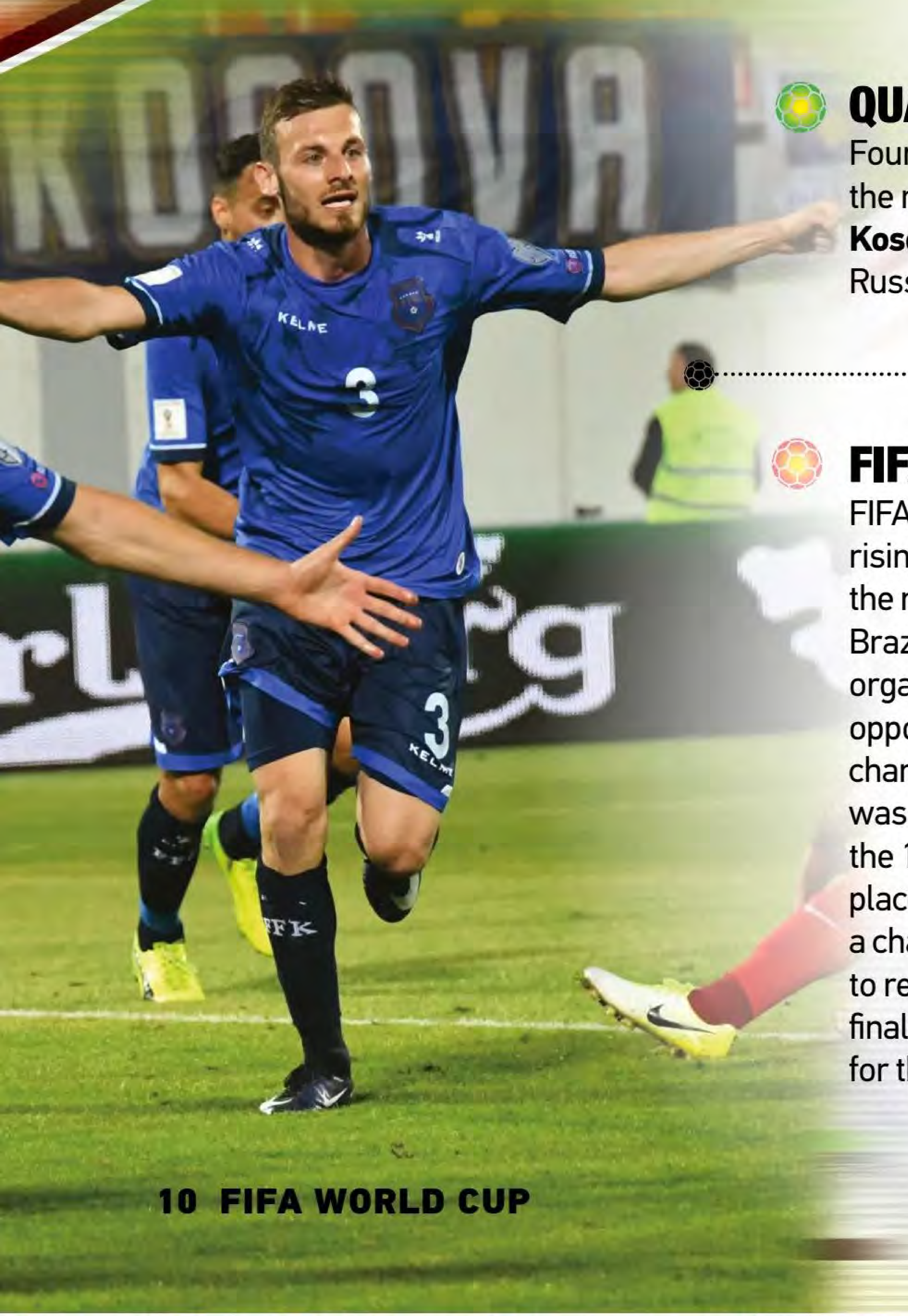
ARRIVEDERCI AZZURRI

Seven previous World Cup winners qualified for the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia, but there was one former champion missing. While Brazil, Germany, France, Spain, Uruguay, England and Argentina all made it through the qualifiers unscathed, Italy missed out on a World Cup finals for the first time since 1958. They finished second in their group behind 2010 FIFA World Cup champions Spain and went through to the playoffs as one of the eight best runners-up. However, they were beaten 1-0 on aggregate by Sweden leading to a strong of players announcing their retirements from the national side, including Daniele de Rossi and 176-cap Gianluigi Buffon. Remarkably, they then repeated the feat when attempting to reach the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Drawing minnows North Macedonia at home in their play-off semi-final, Italy were the overwhelming favourites to progress to a final against Portugal or Turkey. Instead, they succumbed to a stunning 1-0 defeat to miss out on a second successive World Cup less than a year after winning EURO 2020.



NEW FACES

The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia saw two nations make their first ever appearance at a World Cup finals. **Iceland** – who defeated England in the quarter-finals of Euro 2016 – topped a qualifying group that also included Ukraine, Turkey and eventual 2018 World Cup finalists Croatia. Panama booked their place in Russia after qualifying alongside Costa Rica and Mexico, and at the expense of the United States, from the fifth round of the CONCACAF qualifying matches. Both teams would go on to finish bottom of their groups in Russia.



QUALIFYING DEBUTANTS

Four teams made their World Cup qualifying debuts in the run-up to the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. They were **Bhutan, Gibraltar, Kosovo** and **South Sudan.** Unfortunately none of the four managed to make it to Russia.

FIFA OPENS WORLD CUP TO THE WORLD

FIFA has enlarged the World Cup finals twice since 1978, to take account of the rising football nations of Africa and Asia. The rise in interest is reflected in the massive number of sides entering the competition – 211 for the 2018 event. Brazilian **João Havelange**, FIFA president from 1974 to 1998, enlarged the organization both to take advantage of commercial opportunities and to give smaller nations a chance. The number of teams in the finals was first increased from 16 to 24 for the 1982 finals in Spain, with an extra place given for Africa and Asia and a chance for a nation from Oceania to reach the finals. The number of finalists was further increased to 32 for the 1998 tournament in France.





BIG SCALPS

The 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign was one full of shocks. As well as former winners Italy missing out again, a string of other big names will be absent in Qatar. Among them will be Sweden, the four-time semi-finalists beaten to a place in the finals by Poland. Away from Europe, Colombia, who took England to penalties in 2018 having been one of the brightest attacking sides in Brazil four years before, also failed to qualify, as did Chile, the 2016 Copa America champions winning just five of their 18 qualifiers. Africa witnessed its own upset when Ghana pipped Nigeria to a place in Qatar on away goals.

ALL-TIME QUALIFICATIONS BY REGIONAL CONFEDERATION

	Confederation	Qualifications
1	Europe	258
2	South America	89
3	Africa	49
4	North/Central America & Caribbean	49
5	Asia	43
6	Oceania	8

THE FIRST SHOOT-OUT

The first penalty shoot-out in qualifying history came on 9 January 1977 when Tunisia beat Morocco 4-2 on spot-kicks after a 1-1 draw in Tunis. The first game, in Casablanca, had also finished 1-1. Tunisia went on to qualify for the finals.

SPANISH INVINCIBLES

Several countries have qualified for a FIFA World Cup without losing or even drawing a single game. But the Spain side who cruised their way through to the 2010 tournament in South Africa were the first to do so while playing as many as 10 matches. During qualifying for the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia Spain extended their unbeaten run in World Cup qualifying games to 63 games, while Nigeria have gone 36 qualifiers without defeat. Both nations will hope to extend their runs once qualifying for Qatar 2022 gets underway!

A MARATHON JOURNEY

Australia played a total of 22 matches on the road to the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. This impressive figure equals the record set by Honduras and Trinidad & Tobago during qualifying for the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Japan and South Korea. After coming through two group stages they overcame Syria 3-2 on aggregate after extra time, setting up a two-legged play-off with Honduras. A Mile Jedinak hattrick in the second leg in Sydney gave Australia a 3-1 victory and booked their place in Russia.

THE GROWTH OF THE QUALIFYING COMPETITION

This charts the number of countries entering qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup finals. Some withdrew before playing.

World Cup	Teams entering
Uruguay 1930	-
Italy 1934	32
France 1938	37
Brazil 1950	34
Switzerland 1954	45
Sweden 1958	55
Chile 1962	56
England 1966	74
Mexico 1970	75
West Germany 1974	99
Argentina 1978	107
Spain 1982	109
Mexico 1986	121
Italy 1990	116
USA 1994	147
France 1998	174
Japan/South Korea 2002	199
Germany 2006	198
South Africa 2010	205
Brazil 2014	203
Russia 2018	210
Qatar 2022	209



FIFA WORLD CUP TEAM RECORDS

EXTRA SPECIAL GERMANS

Germany, in beating Argentina 1-0 in the Maracana stadium in 2014, became the fifth team to win a FIFA World Cup final in extra time after Italy (1934), England (1966), Argentina (1978) and Spain (2010). In both 2010 and 2014, the Final had finished goalless after 90 minutes. Andres Iniesta, for Spain in 2010, and Mario Gotze, for Germany in Rio de Janeiro, both struck their lone winning goals in the second period of the additional 30 minutes. Extra time was not enough in 1994 and 2006, when Brazil and Italy, respectively, won on penalties.



GOALS GALORE

The 2022 World Cup in Qatar witnessed 172 goals across 64 matches (an average of 2.69 goals per game), the most goals scored at a single World Cup in the history of the men's game. Kylian Mbappe topped the charts with eight strikes, followed by Lionel Messi on seven and then Julian Alvarez and Oliver Giroud on four each.



BRAZIL COLOUR UP

Brazil's yellow shirts are famous around the world. But they wore **white shirts** at the first four FIFA World Cup finals. However, their 2-1 loss to Uruguay in the 1950 tournament's final match – when a draw would have given Brazil the Cup – was such a shock they switched to yellow. The Brazilian confederation insisted no further colour change would follow the shock of the 7-1 semi-final defeat by Germany and 3-0 third-place play-off loss to Holland in 2014.

A SMALL FISH

Iceland became the smallest country (by population) to play at a World Cup when they kicked off their opening group game against Argentina at the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The previous record was held by Trinidad & Tobago.



ITALY KEEP IT TIGHT

Italy set the record for the longest run without conceding a goal at the FIFA World Cup finals. They went five games without conceding at the 1990 finals, starting with their 1-0 group win over Austria. Goalkeeper Walter Zenga was not beaten until Claudio Caniggia scored Argentina's equalizer in the semi-final. And a watertight defence did not bring Italy the glory it craved: Argentina reached the final by winning the penalty shoot-out 4-3.

TODAY EUROPE, TOMORROW THE WORLD

Spain's 2010 trophy-lifting coach **Vicente del Bosque** became only the second manager to have won both the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA Champions League or its previous incarnation, the European Champions' Cup. Marcello Lippi won the UEFA prize with Juventus in 1996, 10 years before his Italy team became world champions. Del Bosque won the UEFA Champions League twice with Real Madrid, in 2000 and 2002, though he was sacked in summer 2003 for "only" winning the Spanish league title the previous season.

THIRD TIME UNLUCKY

Following Spain in 2014 and Italy in 2010, Germany became the third successive World Cup holders to crash out at the group stage during the 2018 FIFA World Cup. After defeat to Mexico in their opening group game, it seemed that the 2014 champions had been given a lifeline when a stunning injury time free-kick from **Toni Kroos** sealed a 2-1 win against Sweden in their second game. However, it wasn't meant to be as South Korea ran out 2-0 winners in the decisive final group game, sending Germany home in the tournament's first big shock.





MOST APPEARANCES IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL

1	Germany/West Germany	8
2	Brazil	7
3	Italy	6
=	Argentina	6
5	France	4
=	Netherlands	3
7	Czechoslovakia	2
=	Hungary	2
=	Uruguay	2
10	Croatia	1
=	England	1
=	Spain	1
=	Sweden	1

BRAZIL PROFIT FROM RIMET'S VISION

Jules Rimet, president of FIFA 1921–54, was the driving force behind the first FIFA World Cup, in 1930. The tournament, in Uruguay, was not high-profile, with only 13 nations taking part. The long sea journey kept most European teams away, and only Belgium, France, Romania and Yugoslavia made the trip. Rimet's dream has been realized and the FIFA World Cup has grown enormously in popularity. Brazil have been the competition's most successful team, winning five times. The only FIFA World Cup finals ever-presents, Brazil have more wins (70) than any other country, though Germany (66 wins) have played more matches: 106 to Brazil's 104. Germany and Italy are the most successful European nations with four World Cup wins apiece. The original finalists, Uruguay and Argentina, are both two-time champions, though Argentina have also lost two Finals. England (1966) and France (1998) both won once as hosts. Spain failed as hosts in 1982 but won in South Africa in 2010.

WHY THE BRITISH TEAMS STAYED OUT

England and Scotland are considered the homelands of football, but neither country entered the FIFA World Cup until the qualifiers for the 1950 finals. The four British associations – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – quit FIFA in the 1920s over a row over broken-time (employment compensation) payments to amateurs. The British associations did not rejoin FIFA until 1946.

ONE-TIME WONDERS

Indonesia, then known as the Dutch East Indies, made one appearance in the finals, in the days when the tournament was a strictly knockout affair. On 5 June 1938, they lost 6-0 to Hungary in the first round, and have never qualified for the tournament since.

MOST APPEARANCES IN FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS TOURNAMENTS

1	Brazil	22
2	Germany/West Germany	20
=	Italy	18
=	Argentina	18
=	Mexico	18



FIFA WORLD CUP STOPS THE WORLD

The FIFA World Cup finals is the world's biggest single-sport event. Television was in its infancy when the first finals were held in 1930, and they have since become one of the most popular TV sporting events of all. The 2018 FIFA World Cup finals in Russia were no different. It's estimated that almost half of the world's population tuned in during the tournament, while the final between France and first-time finalists Croatia is thought to have attracted a global TV audience of around one billion viewers. In France an average of more than 20 million viewers tuned in to watch Les Bleus win their second World Cup trophy in the 4-2 win, making it one of the most watched sporting events in French history.

GOLDEN NARROWS

Before 2010, no country had won five consecutive FIFA World Cup matches by a one-goal margin – but **Arjen Robben** and the Netherlands and became the first, thanks to their 3-2 semi-final victory over Uruguay. Before then, the record rested with Italy, who managed four single-goal wins in a row across the 1934 and 1938 FIFA World Cups. Spain's 1-0 defeat of the Dutch in the 2010 FIFA World Cup was also their fifth consecutive single-goal victory and fourth in the knockout stages.



THE FEWEST GOALS CONCEDED

FIFA World Cup winners France (1998), Italy (2006) and Spain (2010) hold the record for the fewest goals conceded on their way to victory. All three conceded just two. Spain also hold the record for fewest goals scored by FIFA World Cup winners. They netted just eight in 2010, below the 11 scored by Italy in 1938, England in 1966 or Brazil in 1994.

SPONSORS MAKE THE FINALS PAY

The Brazil 2014 FIFA World Cup was the most lucrative ever, with world football's governing body, FIFA, achieving a surplus of more than $2 billion. Two-thirds of FIFA World Cup revenues come from TV rights. This was the fifth finals played with 32 teams, the number going up from 24 for the France 1998 FIFA World Cup.

BRAZIL'S GOALS GLOOM

The 14 goals conceded by Brazil in the 2014 FIFA World Cup finals are the most ever conceded by the host nation. The overall record was 16 goals shipped by South Korea in Switzerland in 1954. In those finals, West Germany let in 14 but still won the tournament for the first time. It included eight in a group match against beaten finalists Hungary.

FEWEST GOALS CONCEDED IN ONE TOURNAMENT:
Switzerland: 0, 2006



EVER RED

England's victory in 1966 was not just the only time they have won the FIFA World Cup – it also now remains the only time the prize has been clinched by a side wearing red shirts in the final. Spain might have emulated England's fashion sense in 2010 but had to wear blue to avoid clashing with the Netherlands' bright orange – they did, however, change back into their usual red to receive the trophy from FIFA president **Sepp Blatter**.

MOST GOALS SCORED IN ONE TOURNAMENT
Hungary: 27, 1954

MOST WINS IN ONE TOURNAMENT
Brazil: 7, 2002

MOST GOALS SCORED IN ONE TOURNAMENT
Just Fontaine (France): 13, 1958

MOST CONSECUTIVE MATCHES SCORING A GOAL AT FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS

18	Brazil	1930–58
18	Germany	1934–58, 1986–98
17	Hungary	1934–62
16	Uruguay	1930–62
15	Brazil	1978–90
15	France	1978–86



PERFORMANCES BY HOST NATION AT FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS

Year	Host	Result
1930	Uruguay	Champions
1934	Italy	Champions
1938	France	Quarter-finals
1950	Brazil	Runners-up
1954	Switzerland	Quarter-finals
1958	Sweden	Runners-up
1962	Chile	Third place
1966	England	Champions
1970	Mexico	Quarter-finals
1974	West Germany	Champions
1978	Argentina	Champions
1982	Spain	Second round
1986	Mexico	Quarter-finals
1990	Italy	Third place
1994	United States	Second round
1998	France	Champions
2002	South Korea	Fourth place
	Japan	Second round
2006	Germany	Third place
2010	South Africa	First round
2014	Brazil	Fourth place
2018	Russia	Quarter-finals
2022	Qatar	Group Stages

GOING FOR GOALS

Brazil holds the record for scoring the most FIFA World Cup goals with 237. Germany lurk just behind them on 232. There is then a considerable drop down to third place, with Argentina currently on 152 goals, France on 136, Italy on 128 and Spain on 108. At the other end of the spectrum, Trinidad and Tobago, Indonesia, China and DR Congo have all competed at one World Cup, but none of them found the net.

HOLDERS CRASH OUT

France produced the worst performance by a defending FIFA World Cup winner in Japan and South Korea in 2002: they lost their opening game 1-0 to Senegal, drew 0-0 against Uruguay and were eliminated after losing 1-0 to Denmark. They were the first defending champions to be knocked out without scoring a goal. In 2010 Italy emulated France by exiting at the first-round stage, and without winning a match – nor indeed ever taking the lead. At least Italy did achieve two draws – and scored four goals. They opened with a 1-1 draw against Paraguay, needed a penalty to force another 1-1 draw against minnows New Zealand, and they were on their way home after losing 3-2 to Slovakia.



THREE AND OUT

The Netherlands, coached by **Bert van Marwijk** in 2010, became the only country to have reached the final of three FIFA World Cups without managing to lift the trophy once. Their six victories en route to the 2010 final are also more than any other team has managed in one tournament without going on to claim the main prize.

BRAZIL LEAD THE WAY

Brazil scored the most victories in finals tournaments when they won all their seven games in 2002. They began with a 2-1 group win over Turkey and ended with a 2-0 final triumph over Germany. They scored 18 goals in their unbeaten run and conceded on only four occasions.



HOME DISCOMFORT

South Africa became the first host nation to fail to reach the second round of a FIFA World Cup, when staging the 2010 tournament – though their first-round record of one win, one draw and one defeat was only inferior on goal difference to the opening three games played by hosts Spain, in 1982, and the USA, in 1994, both of whom reached the second round. Uruguay's 3–0 victory over South Africa in Pretoria on 16 June 2010 equalled the highest losing margin suffered by a FIFA World Cup host, following Brazil's 5–2 win over Sweden in the 1958 final and Italy's 4–1 trouncing of Mexico in their 1970 quarter-final.

FIFA WORLD CUP GOALSCORING

HOST WITH THE MOST

Brazil have scored more goals (nine) in the opening matches of the FIFA World Cup than any other nation, though their status as double hosts in 1950 and 2014 certainly helped. Between 1974 and 2002 the holders, rather than the hosts, also had the honour of kicking off proceedings. Brazil beat Mexico easily by 4-0 in the 1950 opener in the Maracana stadium, with goals from Jair, Baltazar and Ademir (two). They defeated Scotland 2-1 in the Opening Match of France 1998 (Cesar Sampaio and Tom Boyd, own goal) and then Croatia, 3-1, in 2014, thanks to a double (one a penalty) from **Neymar** and a third from Oscar. A Brazilian also netted the very first goal of the 2014 finals, as left-back Marcelo gave Croatia the lead with an own goal. Italy's total of eight goals in the opening match was mainly thanks to a 7-1 beating of the United States in 1934 – they drew 1-1 with Bulgaria in 1986.





HIGHEST SCORES

The highest-scoring game in the FIFA World Cup finals was the quarter-final between Austria and Switzerland on 26 June 1954. Austria staged a remarkable comeback to win 7-5, with centre-forward **Theodor Wagner** scoring a hat-trick, after trailing 3-0 in the 19th minute. Three other games have produced 11 goals – Brazil's 6-5 win over Poland in the 1938 first round, Hungary's 8-3 win over West Germany in their 1954 group game and the Hungarians' 10-1 rout of El Salvador at the group stage in 1982.

LOW-SCORING SPAIN

Spain won the 2010 FIFA World Cup despite scoring just eight goals in seven games on their way to the title – fewer than any world champions in history, including 11-goal Italy in 1934, England in 1966 and Brazil in 1994. Vicente del Bosque's Spain were also the first team to win 1-0 in all four of their knockout matches. David Villa scored the decisive goal in two of those matches.

GENEROUS OPPONENTS

Chile was the first team to benefit from an opponent's own goal at the FIFA World Cup. Mexico's Manuel Rosas put the ball into his own net during the Chileans' 3-0 win at the inaugural 1930 finals in Uruguay. France, Germany and Italy share the record for receiving the most FIFA World Cup finals own goals, with four each. At the 2014 World Cup, France profited from two own goals, the first courtesy of Honduras goalkeeper Noel Valladares in a 3-0 group stage win; the second was by Nigeria's Joseph Yobo, to make it 2-0 in the second-round. Valladares's own goal – the ball struck him off a goal-post and thus denied Karim Benzema a hat-trick – was ratified by goal-line technology, in operation in the finals in Brazil for the first time.







SPOT-KICK SPECTACULAR

There were five penalty shoot-outs in the knock-out stages of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, beating the number set in 1990, 2006, 2014 and 2018. Croatia goalkeeper **Danijel Subašić** saved four penalties in shoot-out wins against Denmark and Russia in 2018, making him only the third goalkeeper in history to achieve this feat after West Germany's Harald Schumacher and Argentine Sergio Goycochea.

THE FASTEST GOAL

Turkey's **Hakan Sukur** holds the record for the quickest goal scored in the FIFA World Cup finals. He netted after 11 seconds against South Korea in the 2002 third-place play-off. Turkey went on to win 3-2. The previous record was held by Vaclav Masek of Czechoslovakia, who struck after 15 seconds against Mexico in 1962.

BIGGEST FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS WINS

Hungary 10, El Salvador 1 (15 June 1982)
Hungary 9, South Korea 0 (17 June 1954)
Yugoslavia 9, Zaire 0 (18 June 1974)
Sweden 8, Cuba 0 (12 June 1938)
Uruguay 8, Bolivia 0 (2 July 1950)
Germany 8, Saudi Arabia 0 (1 June 2002)

MOST GOALS IN ONE FIFA WORLD CUP

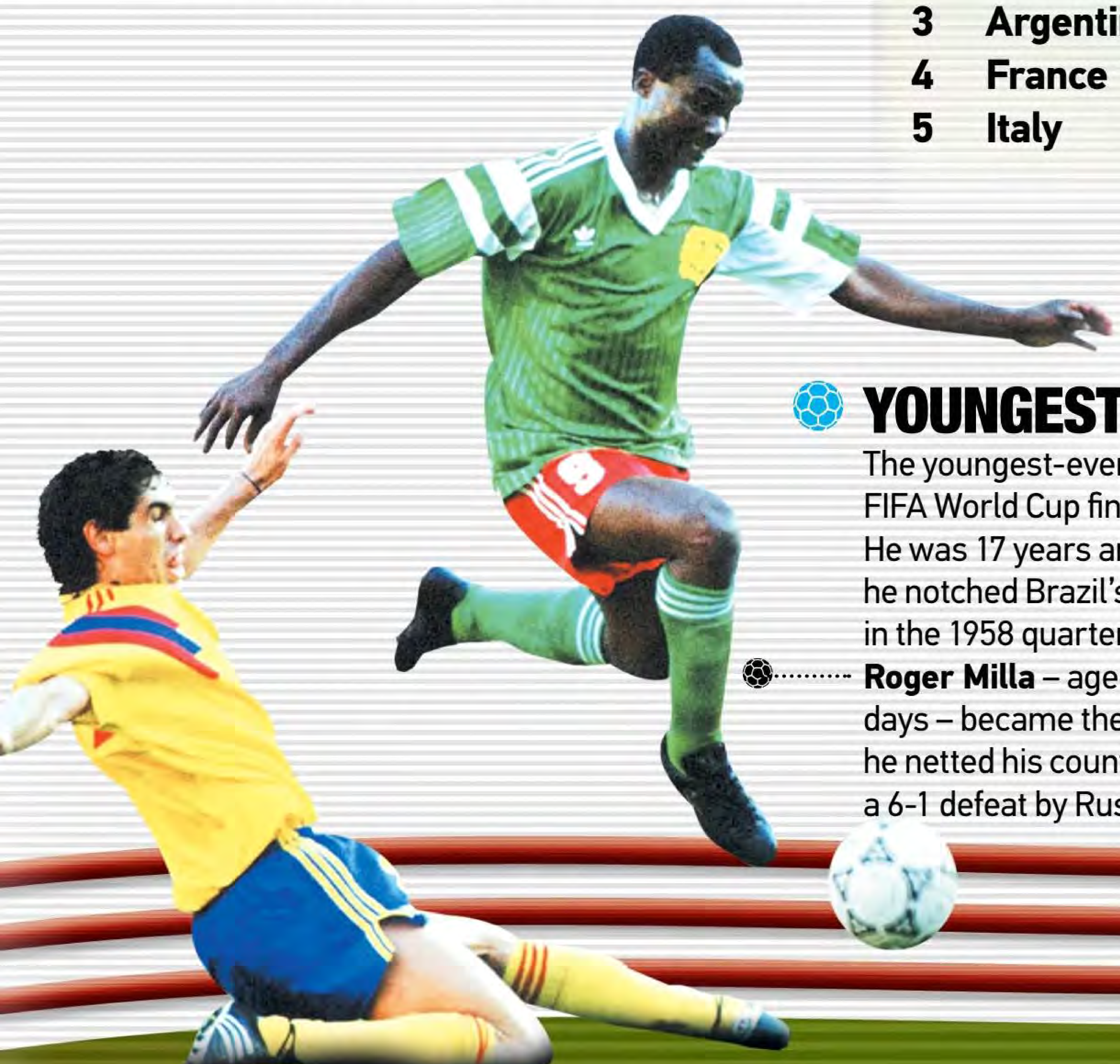
Goals	*Country*	*Year*
27	Hungary	1954
25	West Germany	1954
23	France	1958
22	Brazil	1950
19	Brazil	1970

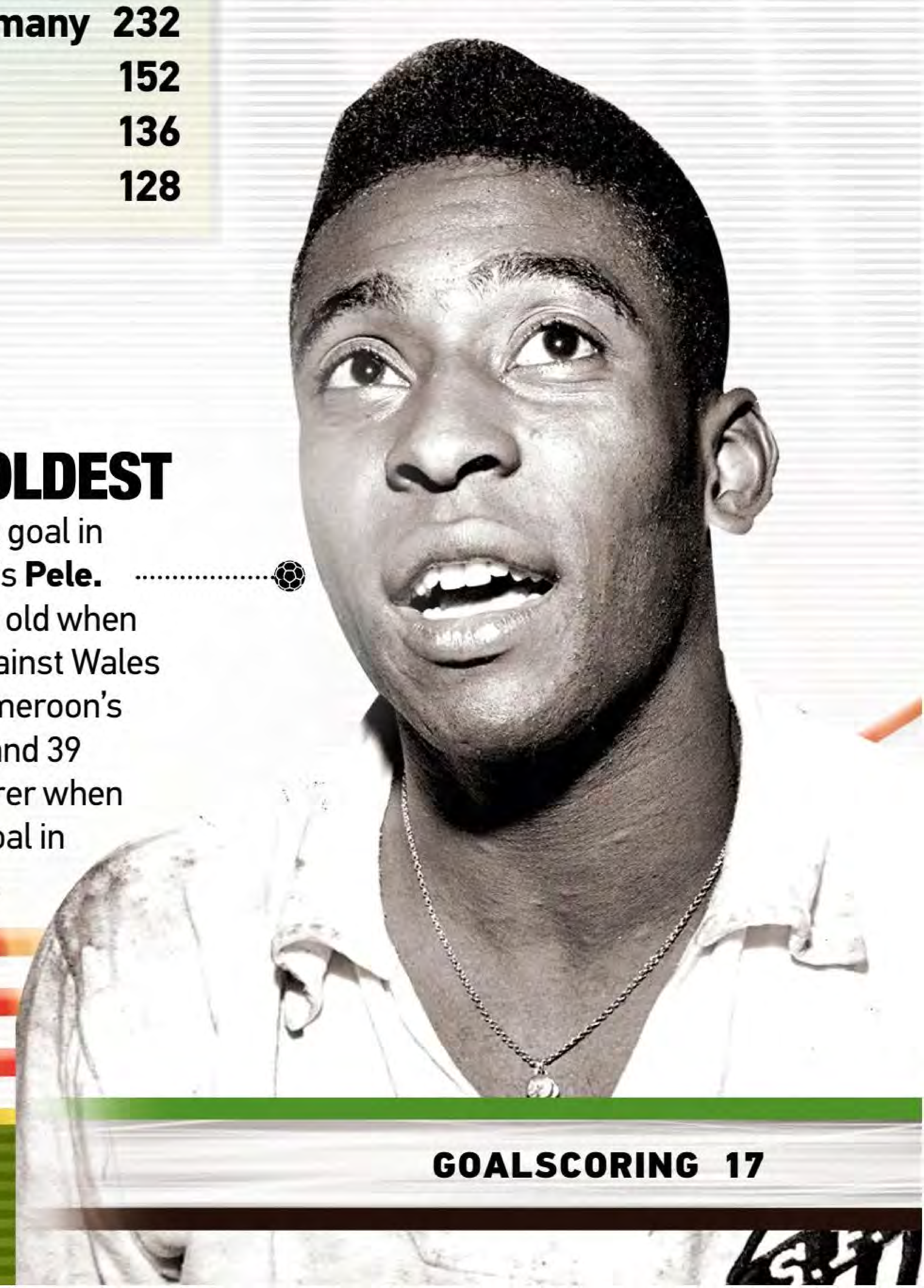
MOST GOALS IN FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS (MINIMUM 100)

1	Brazil	237
2	Germany/W Germany	232
3	Argentina	152
4	France	136
5	Italy	128

FRANTIC FINALS

The 2018 FIFA World Cup Final between France and Croatia was the highest-scoring 90-minute final since Brazil defeated Sweden 5-2 in 1958. Les Bleus' 4-2 victory equalled the six goals scored by England and West Germany in 1966, however, that match was poised at 2-2 before going into extra time. The same applied to the 2022 final, which finished with France and Argentina locked at 2-2. Both sides scored in extra time to make it 3-3 before Argentina won 4-2 on penalties.





YOUNGEST AND OLDEST

The youngest-ever scorer of a goal in FIFA World Cup finals history is **Pele.** He was 17 years and 239 days old when he notched Brazil's winner against Wales in the 1958 quarter-finals. Cameroon's **Roger Milla** – aged 42 years and 39 days – became the oldest scorer when he netted his country's only goal in a 6-1 defeat by Russia in 1994.



TOP DOG

England captain **Harry Kane** became only the second England striker to win the Golden Boot at a World Cup finals after Gary Lineker in Mexico in 1986. Kane grabbed a hat-trick in a 6-1 group stage win over Panama and finished on six goals for the tournament, while his nearest rivals had four.

TAKE YOUR HAT OFF

Cristiano Ronaldo became the oldest player to score a hat-trick in the FIFA World Cup as Portugal drew 3-3 with Spain in the teams' opening game of the 2018 FIFA World Cup. His spectacular 88th-minute free-kick earned Portugal a share of the points in an end-to-end clash.



FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS ALL-TIME LEADING GOALSCORERS

	Name	Country	Tournaments	Goals
1	Miroslav Klose	Germany	2002, 2006, 2010, 2014	16
2	Ronaldo	Brazil	1998, 2002, 2006	15
3	Gerd Muller	West Germany	1970, 1974	14
4	Just Fontaine	France	1958	13
=	Lionel Messi	Argentina	2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022	13
6	Pele	Brazil	1958, 1962, 1966, 1970	12
=	Kylian Mbappe	France	2018, 2022	12
8	Jurgen Klinsmann	Germany	1990, 1994, 1998	11
=	Sandor Kocsis	Hungary	1954	11
10	Gabriel Batistuta	Argentina	1994, 1998, 2002	10
=	Gary Lineker	England	1986, 1990	10
=	Thomas Muller	Germany	2010, 2014, 2018, 2022	10

THE BRADLEY BUNCH

Michael Bradley's late equalizer for the United States, in their Group C 2-2 draw with Slovenia in June 2010, made him the first person to score a FIFA World Cup goal for a team coached by his own father – in this case, Bob Bradley.

MESSI MAKES AMENDS

Argentina's captain **Lionel Messi** left the 2014 FIFA World Cup with a runners-up medal and the Golden Ball, awarded to the finals' best player. He won the award again in 2022, but on this occasion he had a World Cup winner's medal to take home too.





PELE SO UNLUCKY

Pele would surely have been the all-time FIFA World Cup top scorer but for injuries. He was sidelined early in the 1962 finals, and again four years later. He scored six goals in Brazil's 1958 triumph, including two in the 5-2 final victory over Sweden. He also netted Brazil's 100th FIFA World Cup goal as they beat Italy 4-1 in the 1970 final.

MULLER'S SCORING HABIT

West Germany's **Gerd Muller** had the knack of scoring in important games. He struck the winner against England in the 1970 quarter-final and his two goals in extra-time against Italy almost carried his side to the final. Four years later, Muller's goal against Poland ensured that West Germany reached the final on home soil. Then he scored the winning goal against the Netherlands in the FIFA World Cup final. He also had a goal disallowed for offside – wrongly, as TV replays proved.



RONALDO SO CONSISTENT

Ronaldo was a consistent scorer in the three FIFA World Cup finals tournaments he played in. He netted four times in 1998, when Brazil finished runners-up to France, eight as Brazil won the 2002 tournament – including both goals in the final – and three more in 2006. He became the all-time top scorer when netting Brazil's opener in a 3-0 win over Ghana in the last-16 round in Dortmund on 27 June 2006, his 15th goal at a World Cup. He was then eclipsed by Miroslav Klose at the 2014 World Cup when he netted Germany's second in a 7-1 semi-final rout of hosts Brazil.

KLINSMANN'S CONTRIBUTION

Jurgen Klinsmann has been one of the most influential personalities at the modern FIFA World Cup. He scored three goals when West Germany won the FIFA World Cup in 1990 and a further eight in 1994 and 1998. As team coach he then led Germany to third place in 2006, and the United States to the second round in 2014.



HIGH FIVES

Germany forwards **Thomas Muller** (in 2010 and 2014) and Miroslav Klose (2002 and 2006) are the only men to have scored five or more goals at successive FIFA World Cup finals. Muller's ten goals have come in 19 matches, but frustratingly for Germany he failed to find the net in Russia or Qatar as the four-time winners crashed out in the group stages.

WHO SCORED THE FIRST HAT-TRICK?

For many years, Argentina's Guillermo Stabile was considered the first hat-trick scorer in the FIFA World Cup finals. He netted three in Argentina's 6-3 win over Mexico on 19 July 1930, but has since been superseded by Bert Patenaude of the United States. FIFA changed its records in November 2006, to acknowledge that Patenaude's treble two days earlier, in the Americans' 3-0 win over Paraguay, had been the tournament's first hat-trick.

FIFA WORLD CUP APPEARANCES

The opportunity to play for your country at a World Cup represents the peak of any player's career, and many have been fortunate enough to do so at several tournaments. However, only six men to date have played in five different World Cups. This elite group consists of Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, Lothar Matthaus and three Mexicans: Antonio Carbajal, Andres Guardado and Rafael Marquez. Italy's Gianluigi Buffon and Mexico's Guillermo Ochoa have both made five squads but only played in four and three tournaments respectively.



YOUNGEST AND OLDEST

Northern Ireland's Norman Whiteside is the youngest player in FIFA World Cup finals history, being just 17 years and 40 days when he started against Yugoslavia in 1982. The oldest player is Egypt goalkeeper Essam El-Hadary, who started against Saudi Arabia in 2018, aged 45 years and 161 days. The oldest outfield player is Cameroon's Roger Milla who was 42 years and 39 days in 1994.

THIS IS ENGLAND

Of the 831 players selected for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, 136 played their club football in England, with Spain's La Liga the next best-represented league with 83. For the second tournament in a row Premier League champions Manchester City were the most represented English club side with 16 players at the tournament, including eventual champions **Julian Alvarez** of Argentina, while Barcelona boasted 17 and Real Madrid 13 players respectively.

MOST APPEARANCES IN FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS

26 **Lionel Messi** (Argentina)
25 **Lothar Matthaus** (West Germany/Germany)
24 **Miroslav Klose** (Germany)
23 **Paolo Maldini** (Italy)
22 **Cristiano Ronaldo** (Portugal)
21 **Diego Maradona** (Argentina)
Uwe Seeler (West Germany)
Wladyslaw Zmuda (Poland)
20 **Cafu** (Brazil)
Philipp Lahm (Germany)
Hugo Lloris (France)



DOUBLE WINNERS

Players who have played on the winning side in two FIFA World Cup finals:

Giovanni Ferrari (Italy), 1934, 1938
Giuseppe Meazza (Italy), 1934, 1938
Pele (Brazil), 1958, 1970
Didi (Brazil), 1958, 1962
Djalma Santos (Brazil), 1958, 1962
Garrincha (Brazil), 1958, 1962
Gilmar (Brazil), 1958, 1962
Nilton Santos (Brazil), 1958, 1962
Vava (Brazil), 1958, 1962
Zagallo (Brazil), 1958, 1962
Zito (Brazil), 1958, 1962
Cafu (Brazil), 1994, 2002

THE 'DOUBLE' CHAMPIONS

Franz Beckenbauer, Mario Zagallo and, now, Didier Deschamps are a unique trio. They have all won the FIFA World Cup as a player and a coach. Beckenbauer also had the distinction of captaining West Germany to victory on home soil in 1974. As coach, he steered them to the final in Mexico in 1986 and to victory over Argentina in Italy four years later. Zagallo gained two winners' medals as a player. He was the left-winger in Brazil's march to the 1958 championship, before playing a deeper role in 1962. He took over from Joao Saldanha as Brazil coach three months before the 1970 finals and guided the side to victory in all six of its games. Didier Deschamps led hosts France to their first World Cup win in 1998, before taking over as manager of the national team in 2012. He guided Les Bleus to World Cup glory for the second time as France overcame Croatia 4-2 in the 2018 FIFA World Cup final.

MOST FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS TOURNAMENTS

The following all played in at least four FIFA World Cup finals.

5 **Antonio Carbajal** (Mexico) 1950, 1954, 1958, 1962, 1966
Lothar Matthaus (W Germany/Germany) 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1998
Rafael Marquez (Mexico) 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Lionel Messi (Argentina) 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022
Andres Guardado (Mexico) 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022
Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal) 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022

4 **Gianluigi Buffon** (Italy) 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014
Sami Al-Jaber (Saudi Arabia) 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006
DaMarcus Beasley (United States) 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014
Valon Behrami (Switzerland) 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Giuseppe Bergomi (Italy) 1982, 1986, 1990, 1998
Cafu (Brazil) 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006
Tim Cahill (Australia) 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Denis Caniza (Paraguay) 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Fabio Cannavaro (Italy) 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Iker Casillas (Spain) 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014
Samuel Eto'o (Cameroon) 1998, 2002, 2010, 2014
Thierry Henry (France) 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Xavi Hernandez (Spain) 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014
Hong Myung-Bo (South Korea) 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002
Andres Iniesta (Spain) 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Miroslav Klose (Germany) 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014
Paolo Maldini (Italy) 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002
Diego Maradona (Argentina) 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994
Javier Mascherano (Argentina) 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Pele (Brazil) 1958, 1962, 1966, 1970
Sergio Ramos (Spain) 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Gianni Rivera (Italy) 1962, 1966, 1970, 1974
Pedro Rocha (Uruguay) 1962, 1966, 1970, 1974

REWIND AND REVIEW

VAR (or video assistant referee) made its first ever appearance at a World Cup during the 2018 tournament in Russia. The system, which allowed referees to refer to video replays before making difficult decisions, had been trialled in a number of leagues around the world, but the decision to use it at the World Cup proved a controversial one.

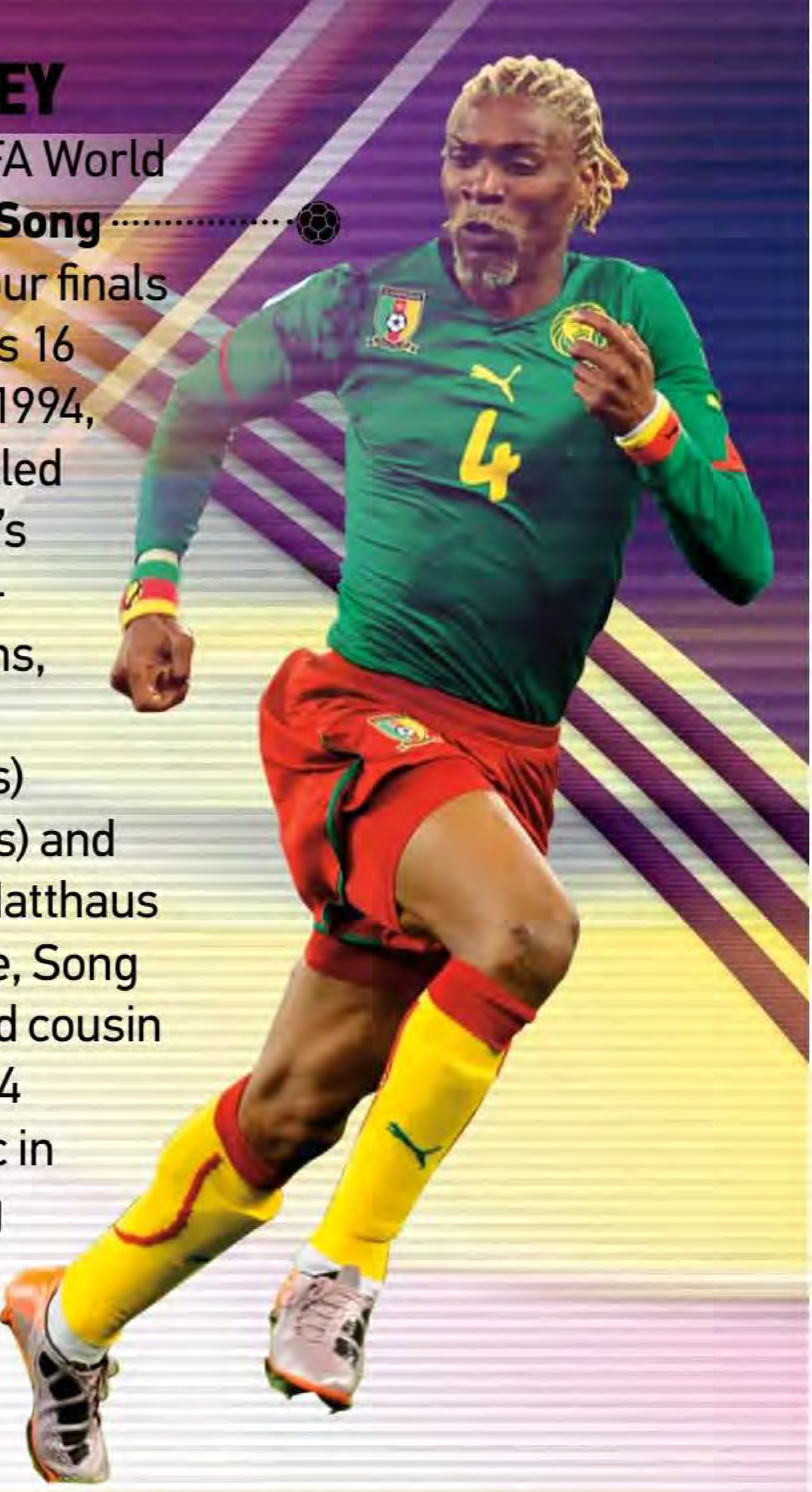
VARANE'S THE MAN

Raphael Varane was an ever-present for France as they won their second World Cup during the 2018 FIFA World Cup. He played in every minute of all seven of France's games as they progressed to the final before beating Croatia 4-2 in Moscow. Not only that but Varane also became the 11th player to win both the UEFA Champions League and FIFA World Cup. Varane played for Real Madrid as they beat Liverpool 3-1 in the UEFA Champions League Final in May 2018. He joined Real Madrid from Lens in 2011 and went on to win 18 major club honours with the Spanish giants. In the summer of 2021 he moved to Manchester United in a £41-million deal.



SONG FAMILY GOES OFF KEY

In playing 17 minutes at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Cameroon defender **Rigobert Song** became the first African to play in four finals tournaments – nine matches, across 16 years and nine days. He featured in 1994, 1998, 2002 and 2010 – Cameroon failed to qualify in 2006. He, and Colombia's Faryd Mondragon, share the fourth-longest FIFA World Cup career-spans, bettered only by Mexicans Antonio Carbajal (spanning 16 years, 25 days) and Hugo Sanchez (16 years, 17 days) and West Germany/Germany's Lothar Matthaus (16 years, 14 days). On the down side, Song was sent off twice at World Cups and cousin Alex Song was dismissed at the 2014 finals for elbowing Mario Mandzukic in a 4-0 loss to Croatia. Thus, the Song family is responsible for three of Cameroon's eight FIFA World Cup finals red cards.



MOST FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS MATCHES (BY POSITION)

Goalkeeper: Hugo Lloris (France, 20 matches); Manuel Neuer (Germany, 19)
Defence: Paolo Maldini (Italy, 23); Wladyslaw Zmuda (Poland, 21); Cafu (Brazil, 20); Philipp Lahm (Germany, 20)
Midfielders: Lothar Matthaus (W. Germany/Germany, 25); Bastian Schweinsteiger (Germany, 20)
Forwards: Lionel Messi (Argentina, 26); Miroslav Klose (Germany, 24); Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal, 23); Diego Maradona (Argentina, 21); Uwe Seeler (West Germany, 21); Grzegorz Lato (Poland, 20)

PROSINECKI'S SCORING RECORD

Robert Prosinecki is the only player to have scored for different countries in FIFA World Cup finals tournaments. He netted for Yugoslavia in their 4-1 win over the United Arab Emirates in the 1990 tournament. Eight years later, following the break-up of the old Yugoslavia, he scored for Croatia in their 3-0 group-game win over Jamaica, and then netted the first goal in his side's 2-1 third-place play-off victory over the Netherlands.

QUICKEST SUBSTITUTIONS

The three fastest substitutions in the history of the FIFA World Cup finals have all come in the fourth minute. In each case the player substituted was so seriously injured that he took no further part in the tournament: Steve Hodge came on for Bryan Robson in England's 0-0 draw with Morocco in 1986; Giuseppe Bergomi replaced Alessandro Nesta in Italy's 2-1 win over Austria in 1998; and Peter Crouch subbed for Michael Owen in England's 2-2 draw with Sweden in 2006.



PRIZE PROBLEM

Winning the FIFA Best Player award has not always proven to be a lucky omen. The winner has never gone on to win the next World Cup. The 2018 FIFA World Cup was no different as **Cristiano Ronaldo**, voted the Best FIFA Men's Player in 2017, and his Portugal team-mates were eliminated in the second round. His rival and former world player of the year, Argentina's Lionel Messi, was on the losing side against Germany in the 2014 FIFA World Cup Final. Messi's Argentina also went out at the quarter-finals stage of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

FASTEST RED CARDS IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS

Time	Player
1 min	Jose Batista (Uruguay) v Scotland, 1986
4 min	Carlos Sanchez (Colombia) v Japan, 2018
8 min	Giorgio Ferrini (Italy) v Chile, 1962
14 min	Zeze Procopio (Brazil) v Czechoslovakia, 1938
19 min	Mohammed Al Khlaiwi (Saudi Arabia) v France, 1998
	Miguel Bossio (Uruguay) v Denmark, 1986
21 min	Gianluca Pagliuca (Italy) v Rep of Ireland, 1994

FASTEST YELLOW CARDS IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS

Time	Player
1 min	Jesus Gallardo (Mexico) v Sweden, 2018
	Sergei Gorlukovich (Russia) v Sweden, 1994
	Giampiero Marini (Italy) v Poland, 1982
2 min	Jesus Arellano (Mexico) v Italy, 2002
	Henri Camara (Senegal) v Uruguay, 2002
	Michael Emenalo (Nigeria) v Italy, 1994
	Humberto Suazo (Chile) v Switzerland, 2010
	Mark van Bommel (Netherlands) v Port., 2006

SIMUNIC'S THREE-CARD MATCH

Croatia's Josip Simunic shares (with Ray Richards of Australia in 1974) the record for collecting the most yellow cards in one match at the FIFA World Cup finals – three. He received three yellows against Australia in 2006 before he was sent off by English referee Graham Poll. When Poll showed Simunic his second yellow, he forgot he had already booked him.

LEADING CAPTAINS

Five players have each captained their teams in two FIFA World Cup finals – Lionel Messi and Diego Maradona of Argentina, Hugo Lloris of France, Dunga of Brazil and West Germany's Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. No player has won the World Cup twice as captain. Maradona lifted the trophy in 1986 but was a loser four years later. Dunga was the winning skipper in 1994 but was on the losing side in 1998. Rummenigge was a loser on both occasions, in 1982 and 1986. Lionel Messi, who has made the most appearances as captain at the FIFA World Cup finals with 19, lost in 2014 but was victorious in 2022.



SUPER SUBS IMPOSE THEIR WILL

Substitutes scored more goals in the Brazil 2014 FIFA World Cup than in any previous finals. Mario Gotze's goal in the final was the 32nd by a substitute, extending the record from the previous mark of 24 set in 2006 in Germany. Substitutes, two of them, were first permitted for the 1970 finals in Mexico, and it went up to three from 1998. The 1998 FIFA World Cup finals also saw the fastest goal by a substitute. Denmark's **Ebbe Sand** scored 16 seconds after coming on against Nigeria.

FIRST ELEVEN

In an age of squad numbers, **Brazil** may have pleased some traditionalists when fielding players wearing shirt numbers one to 11 in the starting line-ups for their first two games of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, against North Korea and the Ivory Coast. Kicking off for coach Dunga on each occasion were: 1 Julio Cesar, 2 Maicon, 3 Lucio, 4 Juan, 5 Felipe Melo, 6 Michel Bastos, 7 Elano, 8 Gilberto Silva, 9 Luis Fabiano, 10 Kaka and 11 Robinho. **The Netherlands** managed a similar starting structure for not only their second-round tie against Slovakia, but the final against Spain: 1 Maarten Stekelenburg, 2 Gregory van der Wiel, 3 Johnny Heitinga, 4 Joris Mathijsen, 5 Giovanni van Bronckhorst, 6 Mark van Bommel, 7 Dirk Kuyt, 8 Nigel de Jong, 9 Robin van Persie, 10 Wesley Sneijder and 11 Arjen Robben. Both Brazil and the Netherlands came close to the same feat when they met in the quarter-finals, though both featured a number 13 – Brazil's Dani Alves, in place of 7 Elano, and the Netherlands' Andre Ooijer instead of 4 Joris Mathijsen (Elano and Mathijsen were unavailable through injury).





YOUNGEST PLAYERS IN FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL

Pele (Brazil) – 17 years, 249 days, in 1958
Giuseppe Bergomi (Italy) – 18 years, 201 days, in 1982
Kylian Mbappe (France) – 19 years, 207 days, in 2018

OLDEST PLAYERS IN FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL

Dino Zoff (Italy) – 40 years, 133 days, in 1982
Gunnar Gren (Sweden) – 37 years, 241 days, in 1958
Jan Jongbloed (Netherlands) – 37 years, 212 days, in 1978
Nilton Santos (Brazil) – 37 years, 32 days, in 1962

PUZACH THE FIRST SUB

The first substitute in FIFA World Cup finals history was Anatoli Puzach of the Soviet Union. He replaced Viktor Serebrianikov at half-time of the Soviets' 0-0 draw with hosts Mexico on 31 May 1970. The 1970 tournament was the first in which substitutes were allowed, with two permitted for each side. FIFA increased this to three per team for the 1998 finals.

FOUR AND OUT

The most players sent off in one FIFA World Cup finals game is four. Costinha and Deco of Portugal and Khalid Boulahrouz and Gio van Bronckhorst of the Netherlands were sent off by Russian referee Valentin Ivanov in their second-round match in Germany in 2006.

CANIGGIA – SENT OFF, WHILE ON THE BENCH…

Claudio Caniggia of Argentina became the first player to be sent off from the substitutes' bench, during the match against Sweden in 2002. Caniggia was dismissed in first-half stoppage time for dissent towards UAE referee Ali Bujsaim. Caniggia carried on protesting after the referee warned him to keep quiet, so Bujsaim showed him a red card.

MALDINI'S MINUTES RECORD

Lothar Matthaus of West Germany/Germany has started the most FIFA World Cup finals matches – 25. But Italy defender **Paolo Maldini** (left) has stayed on the field for longer, despite starting two games fewer. Maldini played for 2,220 minutes, Matthaus for 2,052. According to the stopwatch, the top four are completed by Uwe Seeler of West Germany, who played for 1,980 minutes, and Argentina's Diego Maradona, who played for 1,938.

GERMANY UNITED

Germany and West Germany are counted together in World Cup records because the Deutscher Fussball-Bund, founded in 1900, was the original governing body and the DFB was in charge of the national game before World War 2, during the East–West split and post-reunification. German sides have won the World Cup four times and appeared in the Final a record eight times. In 2014, match-deciding substitutes Andre Schurrle and Mario Gotze were the first players born in Germany since reunification to win the World Cup, while team-mate Toni Kroos was the only 2014 squad-member to have been born in what was East Germany. Kroos was also the first player from the former East Germany to win the World Cup.

UNBEATEN GOALKEEPERS IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS*

Walter Zenga (Italy)	517 minutes without conceding a goal, 1990
Peter Shilton (England)	502 minutes, 1986–90
Iker Casillas (Spain)	476 minutes, 2010–14
Sepp Maier (W Germany)	475 minutes, 1974–78
Gianluigi Buffon (Italy)	460 minutes, 2006
Emerson Leao (Brazil)	458 minutes, 1978
Gordon Banks (England)	442 minutes, 1966

* Pascal Zuberbuhler did not concede a goal in all 390 minutes played by Switzerland in the 2006 FIFA World Cup.



FIFA WORLD CUP GOALKEEPING



SUPER SUBAŠIĆ

Croatia goalkeeper **Danijel Subašić** was his nation's hero as he led them to their first World Cup Final at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. He was in impressive form throughout the tournament and made several key saves at important moments, most notably against England's Harry Kane in the semi-finals. However, it was his penalty shoot-out heroics that really caught the eye as he became only the third goalkeeper in history to save four penalties in World Cup shoot-outs. It wasn't enough to win him the Golden Glove, however, which went to Belgium's Thibaut Courtois.



NOT THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Italy's Gianluca Pagliuca was the first goalkeeper to be sent off at a FIFA World Cup match – for handball outside his penalty area – against Norway in 1994. Despite sacrificing playmaker Roberto Baggio for goalkeeper Luca Marchegiani, Italy still won 1-0.

ITALY'S ELDER STATESMEN

Dino Zoff became both the oldest player and oldest captain to win the FIFA World Cup when Italy lifted the trophy in Spain in 1982. He was 40 years 133 days old. A predecessor as goalkeeper and captain of both Italy and Juventus, Gianpiero Combi, had led Italy to World Cup glory in 1934.



FIVE-STAR CARBAJAL

Antonio Carbajal, of Mexico, is one of only six men to have appeared at five FIFA World Cup finals. Carbajal, who played in 1950, 1954, 1958, 1962 and 1966, conceded a record 25 goals in his 11 FIFA World Cup finals appearances – the same number let in by Saudi Arabia's Mohamed Al-Deayea across ten games in 1994, 1998 and 2002.



ZERO TO HERO

One of the unlikeliest stars of the 2014 FIFA World Cup finals was Mexico goalkeeper **Guillermo Ochoa**. He had spent the previous three years in the European shadows at modest French Corsican club Ajaccio. He feared for his World Cup place when Ajaccio were relegated, but Mexico coach Miguel Herrera was unconcerned and Ochoa repaid him with a string of outstanding performances. Best of all was his brilliant defiance of hosts Brazil in a goalless draw in the group phase. Ochoa, who ended the finals with 61 caps for Mexico, conceded just three times in four games as Mexico lost 2-1 to two late Netherlands goals in the Round of 16.

NUMBER–ONE NUMBER ONES

The Lev Yashin Award was introduced in 1994 for the man voted best goalkeeper of the FIFA World Cup – though a goalkeeper was selected subsequently for an all-star team at the end of every tournament dating back to 1930. The all-star team was expanded from 11 to 23 players in 1998, allowing room for more than one goalkeeper, but returned to 11 players in 2010. Players who were picked for the all-star teams but missed out on the Lev Yashin Award were Paraguay's Jose Luis Chilavert in 1998, Turkey's Rustu Recber in 2002, and Germany's Jens Lehmann and Portugal's Ricardo in 2006. The first Lev Yashin Award was presented to Belgium's Michel Preud'homme, even though he only played four games, conceding four goals, at the 1994 competition – his side were edged out 3-2 by Germany in the second round. Legendary Soviet goalkeeper Lev Yashin, after whom the trophy was named, played in the 1958, 1962 and 1966 FIFA World Cups and was a member of his country's 1970 squad as third-choice keeper and assistant coach – although he was never chosen for a FIFA World Cup team of the tournament. From 2010 commercial priorities led to Yashin's name being dropped from the award and it was renamed the Golden Glove award.

RIGHT WAY FOR RICARDO

Spain's Ricardo Zamora became the first man to save a penalty in a FIFA World Cup finals match, stopping Valdemar de Brito's spot-kick for Brazil in 1934. Spain went on to win 3-1.



HOWARD'S WAY

Tim Howard wrote his name into the FIFA World Cup history books with his amazing performance in the United States' second round clash with Belgium in 2014. Howard registered 16 superb saves in defying wave upon wave of Belgian attacks. This was the most saves ever recorded in a FIFA World Cup tie since the statistic was first introduced in 1966. It was not enough, however: the United States lost a thriller of a match 2-1 after extra time.

LEADING FROM THE BACK

Iker Casillas became the third goalkeeper to captain his country to FIFA World Cup glory, when Spain became champions in South Africa in 2010. He emulated Italians Gianpiero Combi (in 1934) and Dino Zoff (1982). Casillas was also the first man to lift the trophy after his side had lost their opening match of the tournament.

OLIVER'S ARMS

Germany's **Oliver Kahn** is the only goalkeeper to have been voted FIFA's Player of the Tournament, winning the award at the 2002 FIFA World Cup – despite taking a share of the blame for Brazil's winning goals in the final.





UNLUCKY BREAK

Goalkeeper Frantisek Planicka broke his arm during Czechoslovakia's 1938 second-round clash against Brazil, but played on, even though the game went to extra-time before ending in a 1-1 draw. Not surprisingly, given the extent of his injury, Planicka missed the replay two days later, which the Czechs lost 2-1, and the goalkeeper of the 1938 FIFA World Cup never added to his tally of 73 caps.

PLAYERS VOTED BEST GOALKEEPER OF THE TOURNAMENT

Year	Player	Year	Player
1930	Enrique Ballestrero (Uruguay)	1982	Dino Zoff (Italy)
1934	Ricardo Zamora (Spain)	1986	Harald Schumacher (West Germany)
1938	Frantisek Planicka (Czechoslovakia)	1990	Sergio Goycoechea (Argentina)
1950	Roque Maspoli (Uruguay)	1994	Michel Preud'homme (Belgium)
1954	Gyula Grosics (Hungary)	1998	Fabien Barthez (France)
1958	Harry Gregg (Northern Ireland)	2002	Oliver Kahn (Germany)
1962	Viliam Schrojf (Czechoslovakia)	2006	Gianluigi Buffon (Italy)
1966	Gordon Banks (England)	2010	Iker Casillas (Spain)
1970	Ladislao Mazurkiewicz (Uruguay)	2014	Manuel Neuer (Germany)
1974	Jan Tomaszewski (Poland)	2018	Thibaut Courtois (Belgium)
1978	Ubaldo Fillol (Argentina)	2022	Emiliano Martinez (Argentina)

FIFA WORLD CUP MANAGERS





MANAGING SUCCESS

Following France's victory at the 2018 FIFA World Cup, **Didier Deschamps** became only the third person in history to win the FIFA World Cup as both a manager and a player. Deschamps captained France to World Cup glory on home soil in 1998, while in 2018 he led his gifted young team to a 4-2 win against Croatia in the final – a team they'd also had to overcome on their way to the 1998 title. Brazil's Mario Zagallo was the first to achieve the feat, winning the World Cup as a player in 1958 and 1962 before taking the title again as coach in 1970. Four years later Franz Beckenbauer captained West Germany to World Cup glory on home soil. As manager he would taste defeat in the 1986 final before winning the World Cup in 1990.

YOUNG LIONS

Gareth Southgate led England to their best finish since 1990 at the 2018 FIFA World Cup. His young side reached the semi-finals before being beaten 2-1 by Croatia. Southgate then became the first manager since Alf Ramsey to take England to the final of a major tournament at EURO 2020. After being knocked out in Qatar at the quarter-final stage, England managed to navigate a route to the EURO 2024 final, which ended in a narrow 2-1 defeat to Spain, a match that proved to be Southgate's final one in charge of the Three Lions.

DREAM TO NIGHTMARE

Luiz Felipe Scolari quit as Brazil coach after the 2014 FIFA World Cup brought the worst defeat in their history, by 7-1 against Germany in the semi-finals, and then a 3-0 defeat to Holland in the third-place play-off. However, he had won the FIFA World Cup with Brazil in 2002 and went on, with Portugal in 2006, to set an individual record of 11 successive wins at the finals.

PUFF DADDIES

The coaches of the two sides appearing at the 1978 FIFA World Cup final were such prolific smokers that an oversized ashtray was produced for Argentina's Cesar Luis Menotti and the Netherlands's Ernst Happel so they could share it on the touchline.



SOCCER SIX

Only one man has gone to six FIFA World Cups as coach: Brazilian **Carlos Alberto Parreira**, whose greatest moment came when he guided Brazil to the trophy for the fourth time in 1994. His second stint as Brazil coach was less successful – they fell in the quarter-finals in 2006. Parreira also led Kuwait (1982), the United Arab Emirates (1990), Saudi Arabia (1998) and hosts South Africa (2010) at the finals. He had stepped down as South Africa coach in April 2008, for family reasons, but returned late the following year. Parreira was once sacked midway through a FIFA World Cup. In 1998 he led Saudi Arabia for the first two of their three games – losing 1-0 to Denmark and 4-0 to France – before receiving his marching orders.





ELDEST STATESMAN OTTO

Otto Rehhagel became the oldest coach in FIFA World Cup history in South Africa in 2010. He was 71 years and 317 days old when his Greece team lost 2-0 to Argentina in their final group game. German Rehhagel had led Greece to their UEFA European Championship victory in 2004.

CRASHING BORA

Only one tournament behind record-holder Carlos Alberto Parreira, **Bora Milutinovic** has coached at five different FIFA World Cups – with a different country each time, two of them being the hosts. As well as Mexico in 1986 and the United States in 1994, he led Costa Rica in 1990, Nigeria in 1998 and China in 2002. He reached the knockout stages with every country except China – who failed to score a single goal.



DIVIDED LOYALTIES

No coach has won the FIFA World Cup in charge of a foreign team, but several have faced their homeland. These include Jurgen Klinsmann, who played for Germany when they won the Cup in 1990 and then managed them to third-place in 2006. Klinsmann, who was German boss 2004–06, having already made his home in California, was appointed United States coach in 2011. In the 2014 FIFA World Cup, "Klinsi" and the US lost 1-0 in a group match to Germany, now led by his former assistant Joachim Low, whom he had appointed in 2004. Other managers to face their native land include Brazilian Didi (with Peru in 1970), Frenchman Bruno Metsu (with Senegal in 2002) and Swede Sven-Goran Eriksson (with England in 2002 and 2006).

FIFA WORLD CUP–WINNING COACHES

1930 **Alberto Suppici**
1934 **Vittorio Pozzo**
1938 **Vittorio Pozzo**
1950 **Juan Lopez**
1954 **Sepp Herberger**
1958 **Vicente Feola**
1962 **Aymore Moreira**
1966 **Alf Ramsey**
1970 **Mario Zagallo**
1974 **Helmut Schon**
1978 **Cesar Luis Menotti**
1982 **Enzo Bearzot**
1986 **Carlos Bilardo**
1990 **Franz Beckenbauer**
1994 **Carlos Alberto Parreira**
1998 **Aime Jacquet**
2002 **Luiz Felipe Scolari**
2006 **Marcello Lippi**
2010 **Vicente del Bosque**
2014 **Joachim Low**
2018 **Didier Deschamps**
2022 **Lionel Scaloni**

SCHON SHINES

West Germany's **Helmut Schon** was coach for more FIFA World Cup matches than any other man – 25, across the 1966, 1970, 1974 and 1978 tournaments. He has also won the most games as a coach, 16 in all – including the 1974 final against the Netherlands. The 1974 tournament was third time lucky for Schon. He he had taken West Germany to second place in 1966 and to third in 1970. Before taking charge of the national side, Schon had worked as an assistant to Sepp Herberger, coach of West Germany's 1954 FIFA World Cup-winning team – Schon was coach of the then-independent Saarland regional side at the time. Dog-lover Schon, born in Dresden on 15 September 1915, scored 17 goals in 16 internationals for Germany between 1937 and 1941. He succeeded Herberger in 1964 and spent 14 years in charge of his country. He was the first coach to win both the FIFA World Cup (1974) and the European Championship (1972).



PART 2:
THE COUNTRIES

Some call it soccer, others say futbol or calcio or futebol – but go to virtually any country on earth and someone will be speaking about this game by whatever label. Association football knows no boundaries of race or politics or religion.

The structure is simple, helping ensure the sport's international success. At the head of the world football pyramid is FIFA, the world federation. Supporting FIFA's work are the six regional geographical confederations representing Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, South America, plus the Caribbean, Central and North America. Backing up the regions in turn are the national associations of 211 countries – and thus FIFA can boast more member countries than even the United Nations or the Olympic movement.

The countries are pivotal. They field the national teams who have built sporting history through their many and varied achievements in world-focused competitions such as the FIFA World Cup. But they also oversee the growth of football in their nation – from professional leagues to the game at grass-roots level.

Representative teams from England and Scotland played out the first formal internationals in the late 19th century, thus laying the foundation for the four British home nations' unique independent status within a world football family otherwise comprised of nation states. The original British Home Championships was the first competition for national teams but its demise, as a result of a congested fixture list, has left the Copa America in South America as the oldest survivor.

The trend-setting example of the Olympic Games in the 1920s led directly to the creation of the FIFA World Cup and its launch in 1930. Already South America had its own national team championship and all the other five FIFA regions followed in due course. The winners meet once every four years in the FIFA Confederations Cup which is the rehearsal event for the extravaganza, one year later, which is the FIFA World Cup itself – the ultimate celebration of the planet's favourite sport.



The opening ceremony of the 2022 FIFA World Cup takes place inside the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, Qatar, on 20 November prior to Ecuador's 2-0 defeat of the hosts in front of 67,372 spectators.



EUROPE

As soon as modern association football's rules were written in England the game's growth was rapid – enthusiasm spreading swiftly across Europe, the cradle of the game. UEFA, the European football confederation, now boasts 55 member states, from tiny Andorra and Gibraltar to world giants, Spain, Germany, Italy, England, the Netherlands and France. The game is played and followed with a fervent passion across the continent, not only at club but also at national levels. France's 2018 FIFA World Cup glory made it a record four straight wins for Europe, but Argentina would finally break that streak in Qatar in the winter of 2022.



French fans celebrate in Lusail after Kylian Mbappe's 118th-minute penalty dragged France level with Argentina at 3-3. The South Americans would ultimately triumph 4-2 on spot kicks.


4091
10
’S BEST

ENGLAND

England is where football began; the country where the game was first developed, which saw the creation of the game's first Football Association and the first organised league, and which now plays host to the richest domestic league in the world. But England have not had it all their own way on the international scene. Far from it. One solitary FIFA World Cup win apart, as hosts in 1966, the Three Lions have found it hard to shake off the 'underachievers' tag. They failed to do so again in Qatar in 2022, losing 2-1 to eventual finalists France in a close quarter-final, but they did manage to reach the EURO 2024 final.







IF THE CAP FITS

England's players in the historic first game against Scotland all wore **cricket-style caps** while the Scots wore hoods. England's "fashion statement" prompted the use of the term "cap" to refer to any international appearance. The tradition of awarding a cap to British international footballers still survives today.

HAVE A BASH, ASH

Left-back **Ashley Cole** is one of only nine England footballers to win 100 caps but is the only outfield player to reach the mark without ever having scored a goal – next on the list is Gary Neville (85 caps). He overtook Kenny Sansom as England's most-capped full-back when he represented his country for the 87th time, against Denmark in February 2011, and made his 100th appearance against Brazil at Wembley in February 2013. Cole's 98th international, against Italy in the Euro 2012 quarter-final, ended unhappily, as he missed England's final penalty in the shoot-out. But Cole did set another record that day: his 22nd finals match is the most by an England player. After 107 apperances, Cole announced his retirement from international football after being omitted from England's 2014 FIFA World Cup squad. In the club game he boasts more FA Cup winner's medals than any other player, three with Arsenal and four with Chelsea.

RUNAWAY SUCCESS

England have hit double figures six times: beating Ireland 13-0 and 13-2 in 1882 and 1899, thrashing Austria 11-1 in 1908, crushing Portugal 10-0 in Lisbon in 1947 and then the United States 10-0 in 1964 in New York (with Roger Hunt scoring four and **Bobby Charlton** also chipping in with a strike), and finally San Marino, who were also hammered 10-0 in November 2021.

IN THE BEGINNING

The day it all began ... 30 November 1872, when England played their first official international match, against Scotland, at Hamilton Crescent, Partick. The result was a 0-0 draw in front of a then massive crowd of 4,000, who each paid an admission fee of one shilling (5p). In fact, teams representing England and Scotland had played five times before, but most of the Scottish players had been based in England and the matches are considered unofficial. England's team for the first official game was selected by Charles Alcock, the secretary of the Football Association. His one regret was that, because of injury, he could not pick himself to play. In contrast, the first rugby union international between England and Scotland had been played in 1871, but England's first Test cricket match was not played until March 1877, against Australia in Melbourne.

FIRST DEFEAT

Hungary's 6-3 win at Wembley in 1953 was the first time England had lost at home to continental opposition. Their first home defeat by non-British opposition came against the Republic of Ireland, who beat them 2-0 at Goodison Park, Liverpool, in 1949.



STEVIE G FORCE

Steven Gerrard won his 100th cap in a 4-2 friendly defeat to Sweden in November 2012 and could have secured more but for injury. He scored at the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups and was the only Englishman named in the Euro 2012 "team of the tournament". His next international brought an unwanted record: his red card against Ukraine in September 2012 saw him become the oldest player ever sent off for England.

ENGLAND'S BIGGEST WINS

Year	Result
1882	Ireland 0 England 13
1899	England 13 Ireland 2
1908	Austria 1 England 11
1964	United States 0 England 10
1947	Portugal 0 England 10
2021	San Marino 0 England 10
1982	England 9 Luxembourg 0
1960	Luxembourg 0 England 9
1895	England 9 Ireland 0
1927	Belgium 1 England 9
1896	Wales 1 England 9

ENGLAND'S BIGGEST DEFEATS

Year	Result
1954	Hungary 7 England 1
1878	Scotland 7 England 2
1881	England 1 Scotland 6
1958	Yugoslavia 5 England 0
1964	Brazil 5 England 1
1928	England 1 Scotland 5
1882	Scotland 5 England 1
1953	England 3 Hungary 6
1963	France 5 England 2
1931	France 5 England 2

NAUGHTY BOYS

Raheem Sterling's red card against Ecuador in June 2014 was the 15th for an England player in a full international, but only the second in a friendly, after Trevor Cherry against Argentina in June 1977. Alan Mullery was England's first player to be dismissed, against Yugoslavia in June 1968 in the UEFA European Championship. David Beckham and Wayne Rooney have both been sent off twice, while Rob Green is the only England goalkeeper to be red-carded – in a FIFA World Cup qualifier against Ukraine in October 2009. **Paul Scholes** was the only England player to be sent off at the old Wembley Stadium, against Sweden in June 1999, before it was demolished in the 2000s.



NUMBER 1 SPOT

England's 2018 Fifa World Cup goalkeeper, Jordan Pickford, didn't play a single minute of qualifying, only making his debut in November 2017 in a friendly against Germany. However, he wasn't overawed by the occasion – his penalty save against Colombia helped England secure their first-ever World Cup shoot-out win.

BUILT FOR 2022

With an average age of just 26 years and 18 days, Gareth Southgate's England squad was the third youngest at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. Only Nigeria and eventual winners France boasted younger squads. Liverpool's teenage defender **Trent Alexander-Arnold** was the youngest member of the squad, with Ashley Young the oldest and Gary Cahill the most capped player going into the tournament with 59 caps. After reaching the semi-finals of a FIFA World Cup for the first time since 1990 and then storming to the final of Euro 2020, Southgate's young lions had hoped to go all the way in Qatar, but it wasn't to be.

BLANKS OF ENGLAND

A goalless draw against Algeria in Cape Town in June 2010 made England the first country to finish 10 different FIFA World Cup matches 0-0. Their first was against Brazil in 1958, while the tally also includes both second-round group games in 1982 against eventual runners-up West Germany and hosts Spain. An 11th goalless draw followed against Costa Rica at Belo Horizonte in 2014.

WORST OF ALL WORLDS

England recorded their worst-ever performance at a FIFA World Cup finals in Brazil in 2014, when they finished bottom of Group D and were eliminated in the first round. It was the country's first exit at the first-round stage since Sweden 1958 and only the third time overall – the first occasion had been in 1950, the first time the finals had been in Brazil. Roy Hodgson's men managed just one point from their three group games – losing 2-1 to both Italy and Uruguay before playing out a goalless draw with surprise group-winners Costa Rica. Back in 1950 they did at least win one and lose two, while in 1958 they drew all three group games before losing a play-off to the Soviet Union. To add injury to insult in 2014, veteran physio Gary Lewin was stretchered off with a dislocated ankle and had to be flown home early after slipping on a water bottle while celebrating **Daniel Sturridge's** equaliser against Italy.





THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

At 6ft 7in, centre-forward Peter Crouch is the tallest player ever to stretch above opposing defences for England – while Fanny Walden, the Tottenham winger who won two caps in 1914 and 1922, was the shortest at 5ft 2in. Sheffield United goalkeeper Billy 'Fatty' Foulke became the heaviest England player at 18st when he played against Wales on 29 March 1897.

KING HARRY

Tottenham's **Harry Kane** went into the 2018 FIFA World Cup as England's captain and great goalscoring hope. He emerged with his reputation enhanced and the tournament's Golden Boot award. His six goals made him only the second England player to finish as top scorer at a World Cup after Gary Lineker in 1986 in Mexico. Kane scored a brace against Tunisia in England's opening game, a hat-trick against Panama and once in the last-16 match against Colombia. All of his goals were scored from within the box, with three of them coming from the penalty spot. He also found the net in Qatar, scoring against Senegal and France.

WAYNE'S WORLD

During the qualification campaign for UEFA Euro 2016, Wayne Rooney finally succeeded in becoming England's all-time top scorer, overtaking Sir Bobby Charlton's record of 49 goals with a penalty against Switzerland. The goal was the 300th of his career, and came in his 107th international appearance. His sole goal at Euro 2016 was yet another penalty, this time against Iceland, but England still fell to a shock defeat to the tiny nation. It would prove to be his last goal for England as Rooney announced his retirement from international football in 2017 having scored 53 goals in 119 appearances.

FRANK'S A LOT

Frank Lampard has scored more penalties for England than any other player, successfully striking nine since his debut in October 2005 – despite missing another two. The prolific ex-West Ham United and Chelsea midfielder should have had another goal to add to his international tally, but his potential equalizer against Germany during the two countries' 2010 FIFA World Cup second-round match was wrongly deemed not to have crossed the line – prompting the eventual introduction of goal-line technology. Lampard became then-reigning European champions Chelsea's all-time leading scorer in May 2013 with his 203rd goal for the West London club, despite being a midfielder.



BECKHAM'S RECORD

David Beckham played for England for the 109th time when he appeared as a second-half substitute in the 4-0 win over Slovakia in a friendly international on 28 March 2009. That overtook the record number of England games for an outfield player, which had been set by Bobby Moore, England's 1966 FIFA World Cup-winning captain. Beckham, born on 2 May 1975, in Leytonstone, London, made his first appearance for his country on 1 September 1996, in a FIFA World Cup qualifying match against Moldova. He was appointed full-time England captain in 2001 by the then manager Sven-Goran Eriksson – stepping down after England's quarter-final defeat by Portugal at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. He ended his England career on 115 caps and hung up his boots in May 2013, at the age of 38, having just won the league in a fourth different country with French club Paris Saint-Germain. His 68 competitive matches for England are also a national record. Also retiring from the game in summer 2013 was England's fourth highest scorer **Michael Owen**, who netted a stunning solo goal against Argentina at the 1998 FIFA World Cup – only for Beckham to be sent off in a 2-2 draw before England lost on penalties.



ALEXANDER THE LATE

The oldest player to make his debut for England remains Alexander Morten, who was 41 years and 114 days old when facing Scotland on 8 March 1873 in England's first home game, at The Oval in Kennington, London. He was also captain that day and is still the country's oldest-ever skipper.



THE GOOD SONS

Eighteen-year-old winger Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain became the fifth son of a former England international to earn a cap for his country when he made his debut against Norway in May 2012 – 28 years after the last of his father Mark Chamberlain's eight appearances. Oxlade-Chamberlain became England's youngest scorer in a FIFA World Cup qualifier with his strike against San Marino in October 2013. The earlier pairings were George Eastham Snr (one cap, 1935) and George Eastham Jnr (19, 1963–66); Brian Clough (two, 1959) and Nigel Clough (14, 1989–93); Frank Lampard Snr (two, 1972–80) and **Frank Lampard Jnr** (106, 1999–2014); and Ian Wright (33, 1991–98) and his adopted son Shaun Wright-Phillips (36, 2004–10). The only grandfather and grandson to play for England are Bill Jones, who won two caps in 1950, and Rob Jones, who won eight between 1992 and 1995.

GRAND OLD MAN

Stanley Matthews became England's oldest-ever player when he lined up at outside-right against Denmark on 15 May 1957 at the age of 42 years 104 days. That was 22 years and 229 days after his first appearance. Matthews was also England's oldest marksman. He was 41 years eight months old when he scored against Northern Ireland on 10 October 1956.



TOP SCORERS

1	Harry Kane	68
2	Wayne Rooney	53
3	Bobby Charlton	49
4	Gary Lineker	48
5	Jimmy Greaves	44
6	Michael Owen	40
7	Tom Finney	30
=	Nat Lofthouse	30
=	Alan Shearer	30
10	Frank Lampard	29

CAPTAIN SOLO

Claude Ashton, the Corinthians centre-forward, set a record when he captained England on his only international appearance. This was a 0-0 draw against Northern Ireland in Belfast on 24 October 1925.

TOP CAPS

1	Peter Shilton	125
2	Wayne Rooney	120
3	David Beckham	115
4	Steven Gerrard	114
5	Bobby Moore	108
6	Ashley Cole	107
7	Bobby Charlton	106
=	Frank Lampard	106
9	Billy Wright	105
10	Harry Kane	100

CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS

The international careers of Billy Wright and **Bobby Moore**, who both captained England a record 90 times, very nearly overlapped. Wright, from Wolves, played for England between 1946 and 1959 and Moore, from West Ham, between 1962 and 1973, including England's FIFA World Cup win in 1966.



FRANCE

France are one of the most successful teams in the history of football and one of only three countries to be World and European champions at the same time. They won the FIFA World Cup in 1998 as hosts, routing Brazil 3-0 in the final. Two years later they snatched a sensational last-gasp win over Italy in the Euro 2000 final. The French equalised in the fifth minute of stoppage time, then went on to win 2-1 with a golden goal. France had previously won the UEFA European Championship in 1984, beating Spain 2-0 in the final in Paris. They reached the 2006 FIFA World Cup and 2016 European Championship finals too, but lost out to Italy and Portgual respectively. They recovered in in the summer of 2018 to win their second World Cup. In 2022 they reached another World Cup final, which they lost to Argentina.



KOPA – FRANCE'S FIRST SUPERSTAR

Raymond Kopa (born on 13 October 1931) was France's first international superstar. Born into a family of Polish immigrants (the family name was Kopaszewski), he was instrumental in Reims's championship successes of the mid-1950s. He later joined Real Madrid and became the first French player to win a European Cup winner's medal. He was the playmaker of the France team that finished third in the 1958 FIFA World Cup finals. His performances for his country that year earned him the European Footballer of the Year award.



PLATINI'S GLITTERING PLAYING CAREER

Michel Platini (born in Joeuf on 21 June 1955) enjoyed a glittering playing career, rising from a youngster at Nancy to become one of France's greatest-ever players and a hero in Italy. Platini was the grandson of an Italian immigrant who ran a café in Joeuf, Lorraine. He began with the local club, Nancy, before starring for Saint-Etienne, Juventus and France. He was instrumental in France's progress to the 1982 FIFA World Cup semi-finals and was the undisputed star of the UEFA European Championship two years later, when France won the tournament on home soil. During his time at Juventus, Platini finished top scorer in Serie A for three consecutive seasons and won the European Cup in 1985.



A STAR IS BORN

Kylian Mbappe made history at the 2018 FIFA World Cup, becoming the youngest French player to score at a FIFA World Cup or European Championships after netting the winner in France's 1-0 win over Peru in their second Group C match. The then 19 year old, who won the FIFA Young Player award for his outstanding performances during the tournament, followed that goal with a brace against Argentina in a 4-3 victory in the Round of 16, making him the first teenager since Pele against Sweden in 1958 to score two goals in a World Cup match. Again following in the footsteps of the Brazilian legend, he became the youngest player to score in a FIFA World Cup final since Pele when he scored France's fourth goal as they defeated Croatia 4-2 in the tournament's high-scoring finale (now joint with the 2022 final). Four years later in Qatar he was back at it again, doubling his tally to eight goals in a tournament that saw him find the net in four matches. He saved his best for last, scoring a hat-trick in the final against Argentina to rescue France not once but twice and take the game to penalties. With four goals across two finals, he is unmatched when it comes to finding the net in the biggest of games.

TO BE FRANCK

Franck Ribery is one of France's most important and influential footballers of recent times. His displays off both wings helped them reach the 2006 FIFA World Cup final as well as helping lift Bayern Munich to success in the 2013 UEFA Champions League. He is the first man to have been named Footballer of the Year in both France and Germany. Yet he was rejected as a teenager by French club Lille, with 1.7m-tall Ribery later claming they deemed him too short. Ribery was severely injured in a car crash as a two year old, leaving him with lifelong scars across the right side of his face. He finished third behind Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi for FIFA's annual Ballon d'Or award in December 2013, yet his luck turned the following summer when a back injury ruled him out of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.



KISSING COLLEAGUES

Marseille colleagues centre-back **Laurent Blanc** and goalkeeper **Fabien Barthez** had a special ritual during France's run to the 1998 FIFA World Cup crown. Before the game, Blanc would always kiss Barthez's shaven head, even when the veteran defender was suspended for the final. Blanc was on the winning side when France won the 2000 UEFA European Championship final, after which he announced his retirement from international football. He said at the time: "The French team has been my life and has led me to do things I shouldn't have. It has been my mistress – a beautiful mistress."



IT'S A SHAME ABOUT RAY

France's failure to win a match at the 2010 FIFA World Cup meant coach Raymond Domenech equalled but failed to exceed Michel Hidalgo's record of 41 victories in charge of the national side. Domenech did at least end his six-year reign having surpassed Euro 84-winning Hidalgo's tally of matches in the job. Domenech's final game, against South Africa, was his 79th as coach, four more than Hidalgo achieved. Domenech, a tough-tackling defender who was picked for France by Hidalgo, proved eccentric as national coach. He admitted partly judging players by their star signs and responded to being knocked out of the 2008 UEFA European Championship by proposing to his girlfriend on live television.

MICHEL PLATINI (league and national career)

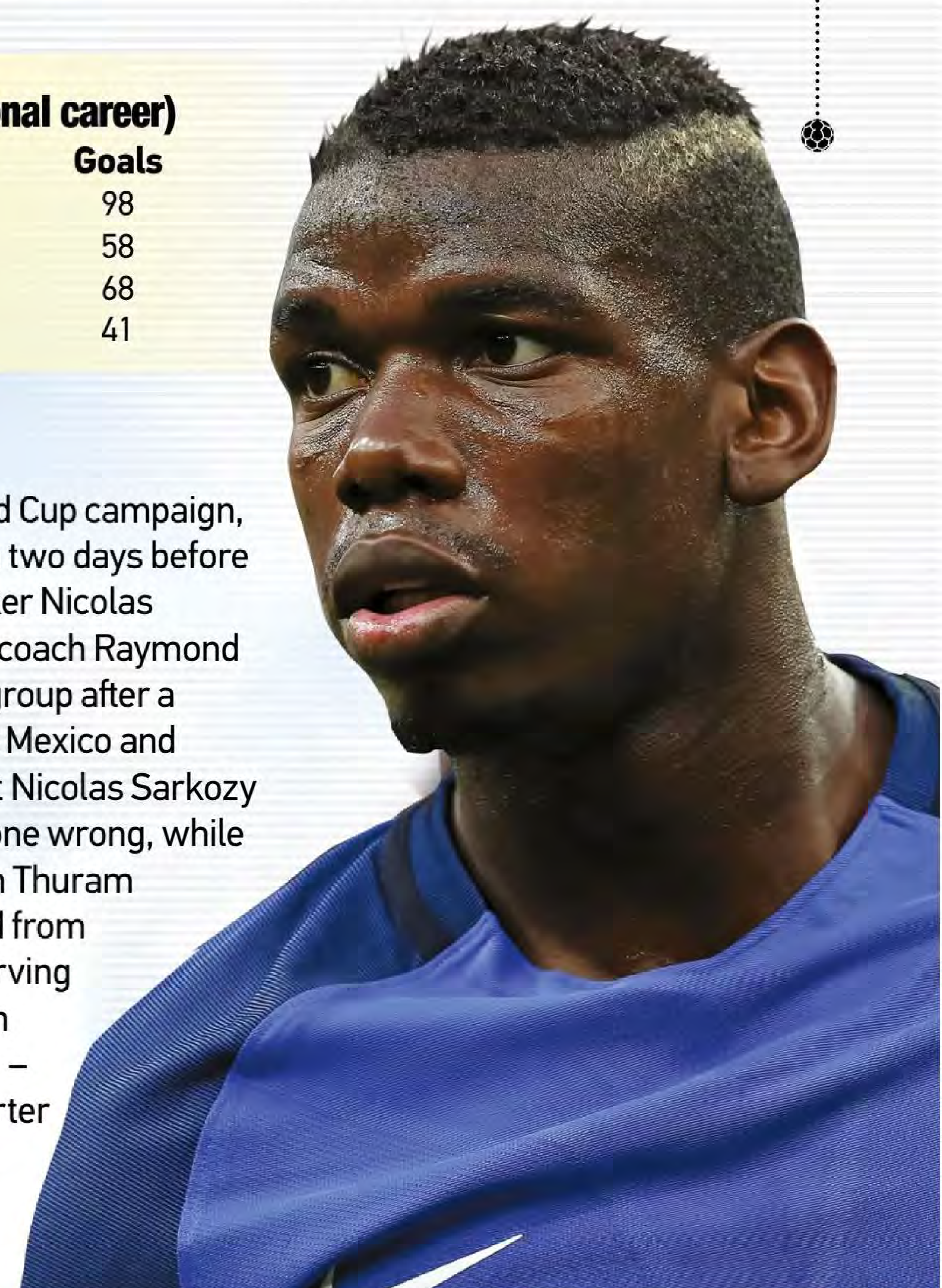
Duration	Team	Appearances	Goals
1972–79	Nancy	181	98
1979–82	Saint-Etienne	104	58
1982–87	Juventus	147	68
1976–87	France	72	41

WRONG KIND OF STRIKERS

During France's disastrous 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign, the players went on strike, refusing to train two days before their final Group A match, in protest at striker Nicolas Anelka being sent home early for insulting coach Raymond Domenech. France finished bottom of the group after a goalless draw with Uruguay and defeats to Mexico and hosts South Africa. The country's president Nicolas Sarkozy ordered an investigation into all that had gone wrong, while former French international defender Lilian Thuram called for captain Patrice Evra to be banned from playing for the team ever again. Despite serving a five-match international ban for his role in the unrest, Evra returned to the fold in 2011 – albeit no longer as skipper – and was a starter for France at both the 2012 and 2016 UEFA European Championships and the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

EXPENSIVE TASTE

Dynamic midfielder **Paul Pogba** carried lofty expectations on his shoulders at Euro 2016, but delivered mixed performances for France. He did score the winner in the hosts' quarter-final victory over Iceland however, and later that summer became the eighth-most expensive player in history when he moved from Juventus to Manchester United for a fee of £89.3 million.



HENRY BENCHED

France's record scorer Thierry Henry missed out on an appearance in the 1998 FIFA World Cup final because of Marcel Desailly's red card. Henry was France's leading scorer in the competition with three goals and coach Aime Jacquet planned to use him as a substitute in the final. But Desailly's sending-off forced a re-think: Jacquet decided to reinforce the midfield, with Arsenal team-mate Patrick Vieira going on instead, so Henry spent the full 90 minutes of the final on the bench. But Henry does have the distinction of being the only Frenchman to play at four different FIFA World Cups (1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010). He passed Michel Platini's all-time goal-scoring record for France with a late brace against Lithuania in October 2007.



TOP SCORERS

1	Olivier Giroud	57
2	Thierry Henry	51
3	Kylian Mbappe	48
4	Antoine Greizmann	44
5	Michel Platini	41
6	Karim Benzema	37
7	David Trezeguet	34
8	Zinedine Zidane	31
9	Just Fontaine	30
=	Jean-Pierre Papin	30

UNITED FOR ABIDAL

Defender Eric Abidal, a key member of the French teams at the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups, was enjoying his best form for Spanish club Barcelona when he was diagnosed with liver cancer in March 2011 – but managed to recover in time for a surprise return to action by the season's end. Club rivalries were put aside when players from rivals Real Madrid wore T-shirts bearing the supportive message "Animo Abidal" after their UEFA Champions League tie against Abidal's former club Olympique Lyonnais a few days later. Barcelona fans then clapped throughout the 22nd minute of their La Liga game against Getafe, in recognition of Abidal's shirt number. Remarkably, he was fit enough to return to action, as a substitute, in Barcelona's UEFA Champions League semi-final victory over Madrid in May 2011. Abidal started in the final and, although not the captain, was given the armband to lift the cup after their 3-1 win over Manchester United. Abidal came through further trauma in March 2012, when he was told he needed a liver transplant. Yet again Abidal would return to action with Barcelona, taking the field again towards the end of the 2012-13 season.



TOP CAPS

1	Hugo Lloirs	145
2	Lilian Thuram	142
3	Olivier Giroud	137
=	Antoine Griezmann	137
5	Thierry Henry	123
6	Marcel Desailly	116
7	Zinedine Zidane	108
8	Patrick Viera	107
9	Didier Deschamps	103
10	Karim Benzema	97

DESCHAMPS THE LEADER

Compatriot Eric Cantona contemptuously dismissed him as a mere "water-carrier" in central midfield, but **Didier Deschamps** provided his infamous critic with the perfect riposte in becoming the most successful captain in French football history. He lifted both the 1998 FIFA World Cup and 2000 UEFA European Championship trophies as skipper and wore the captain's armband a record 55 times during his 103 internationals before retiring in July 2000. Deschamps succeeded Laurent Blanc as national coach after the 2012 UEFA European Championship. Deschamps' ten-match unbeaten run at FIFA World Cups, as a player and manager, came to an end in the 2014 quarter-finals as his side lost 1-0 to Germany. He remained in the dugout to lead France to glory in Russia in 2018 and to a second consecutive final in 2022, which his side narrowly lost on penalties.

BITTERSWEET FOR TREZEGUET

Striker David Trezeguet has bittersweet memories of France's clashes with Italy in major finals. He scored the "golden goal" that beat the Italians in extra-time in the Euro 2000 final but, six years later, he was the man who missed as France lost the FIFA World Cup final on penalties. Trezeguet's shot bounced off the bar and failed to cross the line.

PRESIDENTIAL PARDON

Imperious centre-back Laurent Blanc was known as "Le President" during his playing days and went on to become national coach when he succeeded Raymond Domenech after the 2010 FIFA World Cup. He was unlucky to miss the 1998 FIFA World Cup final after being sent off in the semi-final for pushing Slaven Bilic in the face, though replays showed Bilic had over-reacted. Blanc did enjoy some redemption by being part of the French team that won the UEFA European Championship two years later. He became national coach 12 months after leading Bordeaux to the 2008–09 domestic championship, ending Olympique Lyonnais's run of seven league titles in a row.



LILIAN IN THE PINK

Defender **Lilian Thuram** made his 142nd and final appearance for France in their defeat by Italy at Euro 2008. His international career had spanned nearly 14 years, since his debut against the Czech Republic on 17 August 1994. Thuram was born in Pointe a Pitre, Guadeloupe, on 1 January 1972. He played club football for Monaco, Parma, Juventus and Barcelona before retiring in the summer of 2008 because of a heart problem. He was one of the stars of France's 1998 FIFA World Cup-winning side and scored both goals in their semi-final victory over Croatia – the only international goals of his career. He gained another winner's medal at Euro 2000. He first retired from international football after Euro 2004, but was persuaded by coach Raymond Domenech to return for the 2006 FIFA World Cup campaign and made his second appearance in a FIFA World Cup final. He broke Marcel Desailly's record of 116 caps in the group game against Togo.

ARMBAND FINALLY IN SAFE HANDS

After Patrick Evra lost the French captaincy for his role in their 2010 FIFA World Cup fiasco, new coach Laurent Blanc tried three captains before turning to goalkeeper **Hugo Lloris,** who was finally named as permanent skipper ahead of Euro 2012. He was the only man to play every single minute of France's qualifying campaign and was an ever-present in the finals too. Overall, he kept seven clean sheets in France's 14 matches. Lloris remained captain throughout qualifying for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and at the tournament itself, in which he kept three clean sheets and conceded three goals in five games. He was also Les Bleus' skipper in Qatar in 2022, where he kept one clean sheet. He retired after the tournament having played 145 times for his country. Kylian Mbappe is now the French captain.

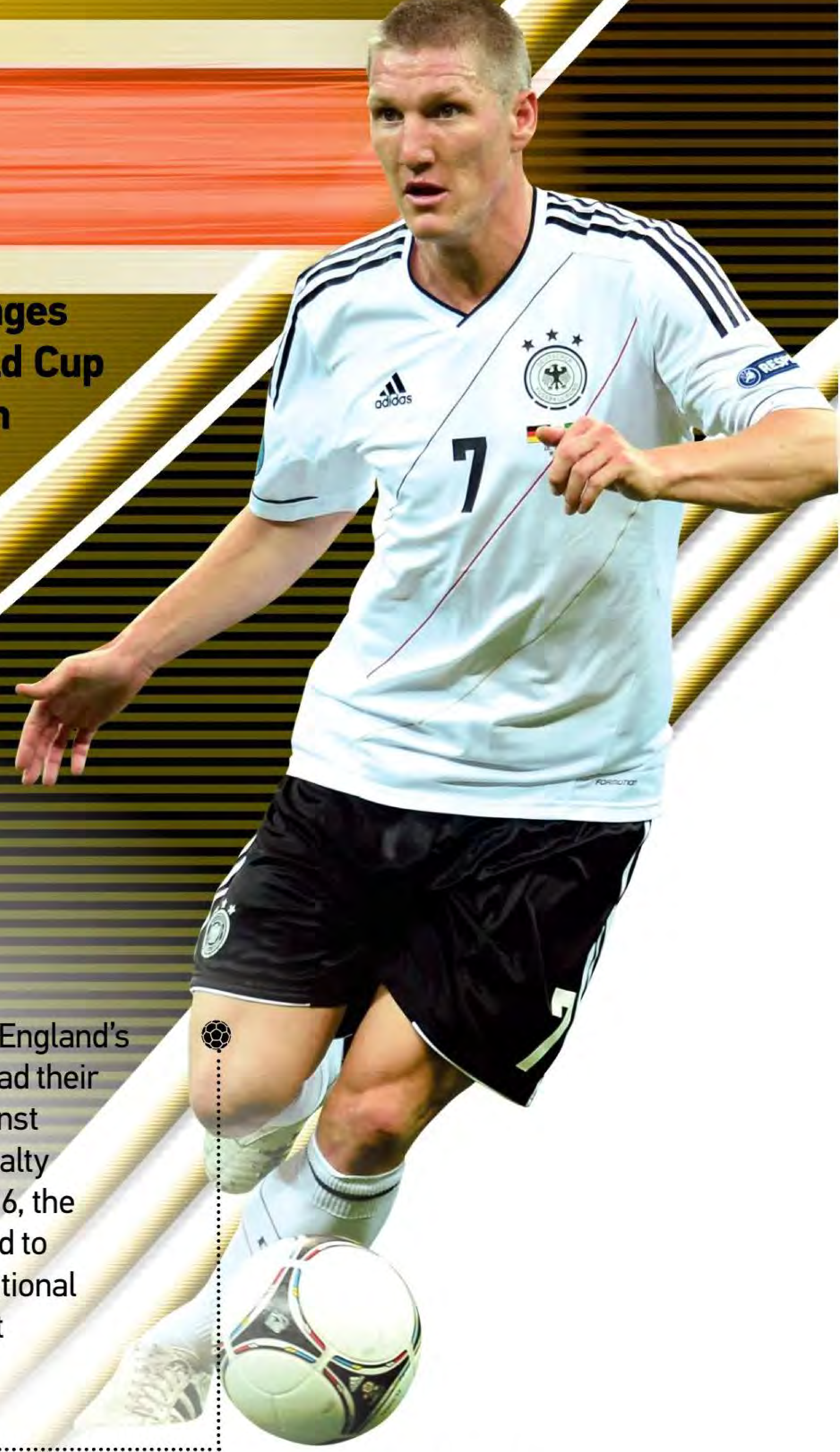


THE FULL SET

Five France stars have a full set of top international medals as FIFA World Cup, UEFA European Championship and UEFA Champions League winners. Didier Deschamps, Marcel Desailly, Christian Karembeu, Bixente Lizarazu and Zinedine Zidane all played for France's winning teams in 1998 and 2000. Desailly won the European Cup with Marseille in 1993 and AC Milan the following year. Deschamps won with Marseille in 1993 and Juventus in 1996; Lizarazu did so with Bayern Munich in 2001, Karembeu with Real Madrid in 1998 and 2000, and Zidane with Real Madrid in 2002. While Karembeu ended the 1999–2000 season with UEFA Champions League and UEFA European Championship winners' medals, he was an unused substitute in both finals – making him the only player to have achieved that particular bittersweet double.

GERMANY

German footballers are almost ever-presents in the closing stages of major tournaments, but their well-deserved 2014 FIFA World Cup triumph provided much joy and relief back home as it ended an 18-year trophy drought. It was also the first FIFA World Cup triumph for the united Germany, having been West Germany when becoming champions in 1954, 1974 and 1990. The Germans are also three-time UEFA European champions and in 1974 became the first country to hold the world and European titles simultaneously. However, the 2018 World Cup proved to be a stunning disappointmnet as they crashed out in the group stages. They then fell at the same stage in Qatar in 2022.



SHOOT-OUT SURE-SHOTS

Germany are renowned as penalty specialists, but they needed no shoot-outs when winning the 2014 FIFA World Cup, unlike their previous two titles, the 1990 FIFA World Cup and the 1996 UEFA European Championship. These both involved semi-final victories on penalties against England.

BELITTLE ITALY

Germany may have become England's bogey-team, but they have had their fair share of misfortune against Italy. Until their dramatic penalty shoot-out victory in Euro 2016, the Germans had never managed to beat the Italians in an international tournament, a sequence that reached eight games when Germany, with stars such as midfielder **Bastian Schweinsteiger** and striker **Mario Gomez**, lost 2-1 in their 2012 UEFA European Championship semi-final. Perhaps the most dramatic clash was Italy's 4-3 victory, after extra-time, in the semi-finals of the 1970 FIFA World Cup. Italy also reigned triumphant in the 2006 FIFA World Cup semi-finals and the 1982 FIFA World Cup final. That's not to say that the Germans haven't been successful, however, and first-round departees Italy watched enviously as Germany clinched the 2014 FIFA World Cup.



NO LOSS

Until a 1-0 opening game loss to France at Euro 2020, Germany had never lost an opening game at a UEFA European Championship. Their 4-2 quarter-final victory over Greece at Euro 2012 set a new world record of 15 consecutive wins in competitive matches, one more than the best tallies set by both Spain and the Netherlands.

BOTH SIDES NOW

Eight players appeared for both the old East Germany and then Germany after reunification in October 1990.

Player	East Germany	Germany
Ulf Kirsten	49	51
Matthias Sammer	23	51
Andreas Thom	51	10
Thomas Doll	29	18
Dariusz Wosz	7	17
Olaf Marschall	4	13
Heiko Scholz	7	1
Dirk Schuster	4	3





EAST GERMANY – TOP APPEARANCES AND GOALS

Appearances

1	**Joachim Streich**	98
2	Hans-Jurgen Dorner	96
3	Jurgen Croy	86
4	Konrad Weise	78
5	Eberhard Vogel	69

Goals

1	Joachim Streich	53
2	Eberhard Vogel	24
3	Hans-Jurgen Kreische	22
4	Rainer Ernst	20
5	Henning Frenzel	19

SAMBA SILENCED

Germany's 1-0 win over Argentina in 2014 came in their record eighth FIFA World Cup Final, this coming after they were the first side to reach four consecutive semi-finals. But the 7-1 semi-final humiliation of Brazil may live longest in the memory – and the record books. Germany led 5-0 at half-time in what became the biggest FIFA World Cup semi-final win and the hosts' heaviest defeat. Other FIFA World Cup finals records include: Toni Kroos's two goals in 69 seconds were the fastest brace and Germany were the first team to score four goals in six minutes. Also, Thomas Muller's opening goal was Germany's 2,000th.

BERLIN ALL

Berlin hosted the 2015 UEFA Champions League final, making it the second German city, after Munich, to have hosted the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup final and UEFA European Cup final. Berlin hosted the Olympics in 1936 and the FIFA World Cup in 2006, while Munich staged the Olympics in 1972, the FIFA World Cup in 1974 and four European Cup finals.

HOTTEST SHOTS

Germany's 7-1 defeat of Brazil in the 2014 FIFA World Cup semi-finals not only stunned the hosts, but also toppled them as the tournament's all-time top scorers. Germany's FIFA World Cup goals total is now 224, three more than Brazil. Stanislaus Kobierski scored Germany's first-ever FIFA World Cup goal, in a 5-2 victory over Belgium in 1934. Germany became the first team to enjoy three four-goal sprees at one tournament, beating Australia 4-0, England 4-1 and Argentina 4-0 in 2010. The 2014 vintage got off to a flying start by crushing Portugal 4-0 in their opening match.

HISTORY MAN

East and West Germany met only once at senior national team level. That was on 22 June 1974, in the FIFA World Cup finals. Drawn in the same group, East Germany produced a shock 1-0 win in Hamburg, but both teams advanced. Jurgen Sparwasser, scorer of East Germany's winning goal, defected to West Germany in 1988 – two years before the two countries reunited.

GOLDEN WONDER

Germany became the first team to win a major title thanks to the now-discarded golden goal system when they beat the Czech Republic in the UEFA Euro 96 final at Wembley. **Oliver Bierhoff**'s equalizer forced extra-time after Patrik Berger scored a penalty for the Czechs. Bierhoff grabbed Germany's winner five minutes into extra-time to end the game and the championship.



SCHNELL, SCHNELL

Lukas Podolski scored one of the fastest goals in international football history when he gave Germany the lead after just nine seconds in their May 2013 friendly away to Ecuador. When Lars Bender added another shortly afterwards, it was the first time ever that Germany had scored twice in the opening four minutes of a match. Both Podolski and Bender scored again by the time 24 minutes were on the clock and Germany ultimately went on to win the match 4-2.

MEIN BENDERS

You could have thought you were seeing double when manager Joachim Low made a double substitution with 12 minutes remaining during Germany's 5-3 defeat to Switzerland in May 2012. His two midfield substitutes were twin brothers **Lars** and **Sven Bender**. Born on 27 April 1989, they both began their careers with 1860 Munich before Lars (the elder by 12 minutes) moved to Bayer Leverkusen and Sven to Borussia Dortmund. Both were members of Germany's 2008 UEFA U-19 European Championship-winning side, but only Lars was selected for Euro 2012. They were the second twins to play for Germany after Erwin and Helmut Kramers. Striker Erwin scored three goals in 15 games between 1972 and 1974, while full-back Helmut played eight times without scoring. Erwin was part of the 1972 UEFA European Championship-winning squad, but was overlooked for the triumphant 1974 FIFA World Cup-winning squad, a set-up that included Helmut.





'DER BOMBER'

Gerd Muller was the most prolific scorer of the modern era. Neither tall nor graceful, he was quick, strong and had a predator's eye for the net. He also had the temperament to score decisive goals in big games, including the winner in the 1974 FIFA World Cup final, the winner in the semi-final against Poland and two goals in West Germany's 1972 UEFA European Championship final victory over the USSR. He netted 68 goals in 62 appearances for West Germany and remains the leading scorer in the Bundesliga and all-time record scorer for his club, Bayern Munich.

IN THE FLICK OF IT

Reeling from a first-ever group-stage elimination at a World Cup and a crushing 2-0 defeat to old rivals England at EURO 2020, Germany needed fresh impetus, and with Joachim Low finally stepping aside, the German FA hired treble-winning Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick in August 2021. However, instead of overseeing an upturn in fortunes the former sporting director only managed to steer Die Mannschaft to four victories in 17 games. The final straw was a 4-1 home defeat to Japan in September 2023, shortly after which Flick became the first German national coach to be dismissed.

A LAHM CALL

Philipp Lahm surprised many when retiring from international football after the 2014 FIFA World Cup, at the age of only 30. He went out on a high, having just lifted the trophy as German captain at the end of his 113th appearance. Lahm had already made a mark in his two previous finals. He scored the opening goal of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, and played every minute of that tournament. Four years later, he became the youngest man to captain Germany at a FIFA World Cup – and the only action he missed was when given a well-earnest rest for the third-place play-off against Uruguay. In his youth, Lahm was a ballboy at Bayern Munich and he later captained them to 2013 UEFA Champions League glory.

DER KAISER

Franz Beckenbauer is widely regarded as the greatest player in German football history. He has also made a huge mark as a FIFA World Cup-winning coach, administrator and organizer. Beckenbauer (born on 11 September 1945) was a 20-year-old attacking wing-half when West Germany reached the 1966 FIFA World Cup final. He later defined the role of attacking sweeper, first in the 1970 FIFA World Cup finals, and then as West Germany won the 1972 UEFA European Championship and the 1974 FIFA World Cup. When West Germany needed a coach in the mid-1980s, they turned to Beckenbauer, despite his lack of experience. He delivered a FIFA World Cup final appearance in 1986, a Euro 88 semi-final and 1990 FIFA World Cup triumph in his final game in charge. He later became president of Bayern Munich, the club he captained to three consecutive European Cup victories between 1974 and 1976. He also led Germany's successful bid for the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals and headed the organizing committee. No wonder he is known as "Der Kaiser" ("the Emperor") for his enormous influence on German football.





MAGICAL MATTHAUS

Lothar Matthaus is Germany's most-capped player. He appeared in five FIFA World Cup finals – 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994 and 1998 – a record for an outfield player. Versatile Matthaus could operate as a defensive midfielder, an attacking midfielder, or as a sweeper. He was a FIFA World Cup winner in 1990, a finalist in 1982 and 1986 and a UEFA European Championship winner in 1980. His record 150 appearances – spread over a 20-year international career – were split 87 for West Germany and 63 for Germany. He also scored 23 goals and was voted top player at the 1990 FIFA World Cup.



TOP CAPS
(West Germany & Germany)

	Player	Caps
1	Lothar Matthaus	150
2	Miroslav Klose	137
3	Thomas Muller	131
4	Lukas Podolski	130
5	Manuel Neuer	124
6	Bastian Schweinsteiger	121
7	Toni Kroos	114
8	Philipp Lahm	113
9	Jurgen Klinsmann	108
10	Jurgen Kohler	105

TOP SCORERS
(West Germany & Germany)

	Player	Goals
1	Miroslav Klose	71
2	Gerd Muller	68
3	Lukas Podolski	49
4	Jurgen Klinsmann	47
=	Rudi Voller	47
6	Karl-Heinz Rummenigge	45
=	Thomas Muller	45
8	Uwe Seeler	43
9	Michael Ballack	42
10	Oliver Bierhoff	37



KLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Miroslav Klose became the third player, after Uwe Seeler and Pele to score in four FIFA World Cup finals. His first goal in Brazil, an equalizer against Ghana, put him alongside Ronaldo at the top of the all-time FIFA World Cup scoring charts. And it was against Ronaldo's Brazil that Klose pushed ahead on his own, his 16th finals goal being a typically-opportunistic finish to give Germany a 2-0 semi-final lead. All 16 of Klose's FIFA World Cup goals have come from inside the penalty area. He ended the 2014 FIFA World Cup not only with the scoring record and a winners' medal, but also on 24 appearances – behind only Italy's Paolo Maldini (25) – and 17 wins, one ahead of previous record-holder Cafu, of Brazil. Klose is also now Germany's all-time leading scorer, with 71 goals in 137 matches – and his team-mates have never lost an international in which he found the net.

GOLDEN GLOVES

Sepp Maier was at the heart of West Germany's triumphs of the early 1970s, including the 1972 UEFA European Championship and the 1974 FIFA World Cup. He remains West Germany's most-capped goalkeeper, winning 95 caps in an international career lasting from 1965 to 1979. He played his whole club career for Bayern Munich and helped them win the European Cup three times. A car crash in 1979, in which he received life-threatening injuries, ended his playing days, but he went on to become a goalkeeping coach for both Germany and his old club.

YOUNGEST CENTURION LUKAS

Lukas Podolski became the youngest European footballer to reach 100 caps when, aged 27 years and 13 days old, he appeared in Germany's third first-round game of the 2012 UEFA European Championship, against Denmark. He marked the occasion by scoring the opener in a 2-1 win – his 44th goal for his country. Podolski was born in Gliwice in Poland, but opted to play for Germany – his family having emigrated there when he was two years old. He was voted best young player of the tournament when Germany hosted and finished third at the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

ITALY

Only Brazil (with five victories) can claim to have won the FIFA World Cup more times than Italy. The Azzurri became the first nation to retain the trophy (through back-to-back successes in 1934 and 1938), snatched a surprise win in Spain in 1982, and collected football's most-coveted trophy for a fourth time in 2006 following a dramatic penalty shoot-out win over France. Add the 1968 UEFA European Championship success to the mix, along with their EURO 2020 title, and few nations can boast a better record. However, it's not all rosy in the Italian garden. Against the odds, the Azzurri were defeated 1-0 in the World Cup play-offs by North Macedonia, condemning them to watch a second successive tournament from home.



GLOVE CONQUERS ALL

Walter Zenga went 517 minutes without conceding a goal at the 1990 FIFA World Cup, an all-time tournament record only brought to an end by Argentina's Claudio Caniggia in the semi-finals.

THE IDES OF MARCH

Juventus midfielder Claudio Marchisio went from hero to villain at the 2014 FIFA World Cup. He opened Italy's account at the tournament with a fizzing long-range drive against England in Manaus, in what proved to be a 2-1 Italy win. This was his second goal in consecutive internationals – having managed just two goals in his previous 43 appearances for his country. But his tournament turned sour not only with a 1-0 defeat to Costa Rica in their second match, but another 1-0 defeat and a straight red card in their decisive final first-round fixture against Uruguay.

ROTTEN RETURN

Italy were knocked out of the FIFA World Cup in the first round in both 2010 and 2014 – the first time they had done so in consecutive tournaments since 1962 and 1966. At least the modern players did not suffer the fate of those arriving home from England in 1966: they were pelted with rotten fruit after a dismal showing most notable for a 1-0 defeat to minnows North Korea.



OFF THE SPOT

Only England have lost as many FIFA World Cup penalty shoot-outs as Italy – three apiece. **Roberto Baggio**, nicknamed "The Divine Ponytail", was involved in all three of Italy's spot-kick defeats, in 1990, 1994 and 1998. Left-back Antonio Cabrini is the only man to have missed a penalty during normal time in a FIFA World Cup final – the score was 0-0 at the time but, fortunately for him, Italy still beat West Germany 3-1 in 1982.

IN SAFE KEEPING

During World War Two, the Jules Rimet Trophy, the FIFA World Cup – won by Italy in 1938 – was hidden in a shoebox under the bed of football official Ottorino Barassi. He preferred to keep it there, rather than at its previous home – a bank in Rome. The trophy was handed back to FIFA, safe and untouched, only when the FIFA World Cup resumed in 1950.

BLUE BOYS

Internazionale full-back Davide Santon became Italy's second-youngest international of the post-war era when he played against Northern Ireland in a June 2009 friendly, aged just 18 years and 155 days and following just 20 first-team appearances for his club. Another Internazionale defender, the richly moustachioed Giuseppe Bergomi, was 42 days younger when he made his debut against East Germany in April 1982, just three months before helping Italy win the FIFA World Cup. Even more junior were Casale midfielder Luigi Barbesino, 18 years and 61 days old against Sweden in July 1912, and record-holder Renzo De Vecchi, an AC Milan defender who was aged just 16 years and 112 days when he lined up against Hungary in May 1910.

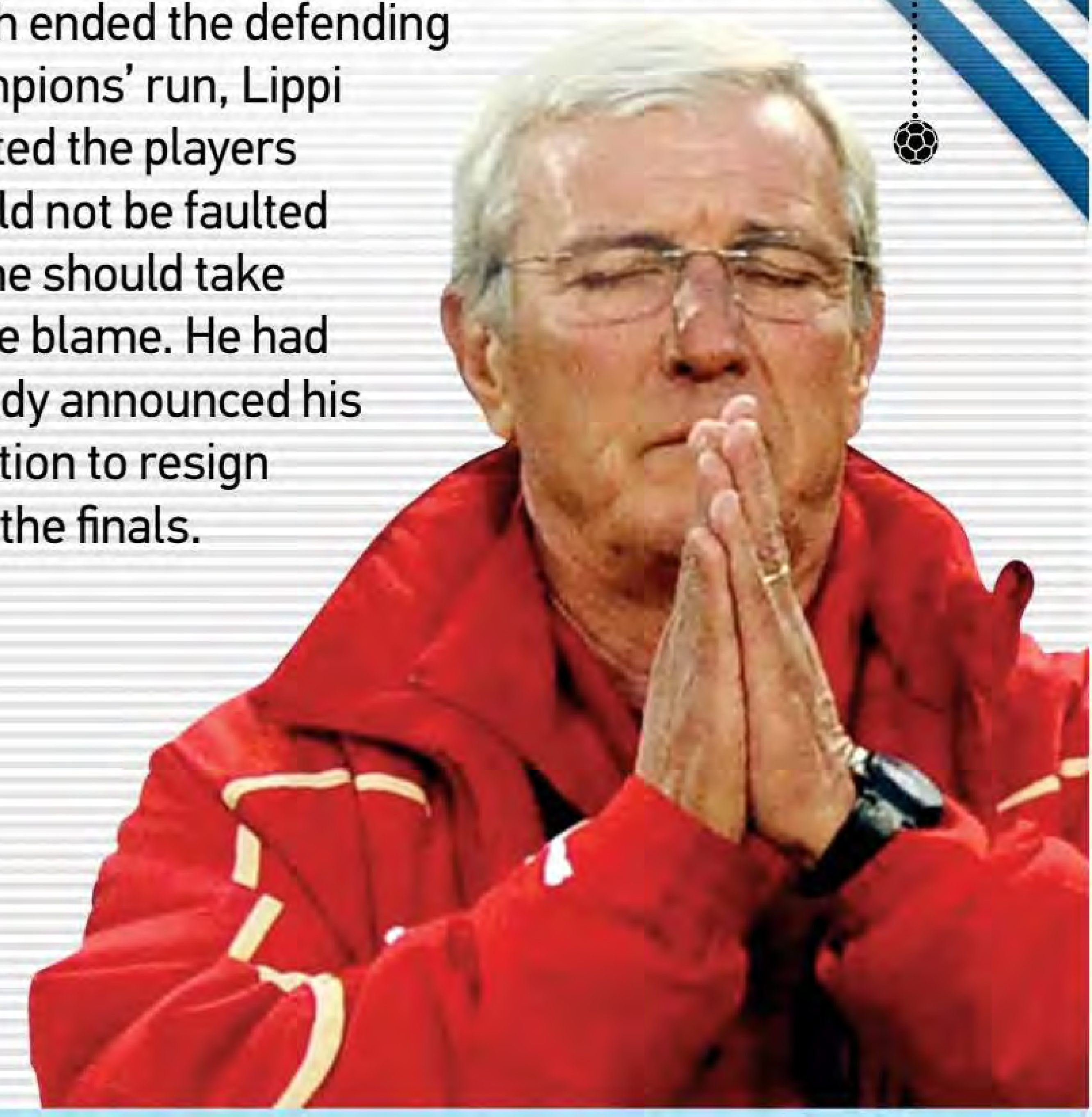


BOSSI DE ROSSI

Combative central midfielder **Daniele de Rossi** was roundly condemned when he was sent off for elbowing the United States' Brian McBride during Italy's second match of the 2006 FIFA World Cup. He returned from suspension in time to come on as a substitute in the final, which Italy won against France. Yet earlier that year, in March, he had won widespread praise for his honesty during a Serie A match for AS Roma against Messina. Roma were awarded a goal when he diverted the ball into the net using his hand, but De Rossi persuaded the referee to disallow his strike – Roma went on to win 2-1. His international honours for Italy include a bronze medal at the 2004 Summer Olympics.

CHAMPS TO CHUMPS

Italy's dismal 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign was the worst in their history, despite going into the tournament as defending world champions. Their two draws and 3-2 defeat to Slovakia meant they ended a FIFA World Cup without a win for the first time ever. Finishing bottom of their first-round group was also unprecedented. The poor showing must have left 2006 World Cup-winning coach **Marcello Lippi** regretting his decision to resume control in 2008. Immediately after the Slovakia match, which ended the defending champions' run, Lippi insisted the players should not be faulted and he should take all the blame. He had already announced his intention to resign after the finals.



TOP DRAW

No team has drawn more FIFA World Cup matches than Italy, who took their tally to 21 with 1-1 draws against both Paraguay and New Zealand in Group F at the 2010 competition in South Africa. Their first draw had also been 1-1, against Spain in a 1934 quarter-final tie. Italy's Giuseppe Meazza scored the only goal of a replay the following day, and Italy went on to lift the trophy for the first time that year.

TOURNAMENT SPECIALISTS

FIFA WORLD CUP: 18 appearances – winners 1934, 1938, 1982, 2006
UEFA EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP: 11 appearances – winners 1968, 2021
FIRST INTERNATIONAL: Italy 6 France 2 (Milan, 15 May 1910)
BIGGEST WIN: Italy 9 USA 0 (Brentford, London, 17 August 1948 – Olympic Games)
BIGGEST DEFEAT: Hungary 7 Italy 1 (Budapest, 6 April 1924)

FLYING HIGH

Vittorio Pozzo is the only man to have won the FIFA World Cup twice as manager – both times with Italy, in 1934 and 1938 (only two players, Giuseppe Meazza and Giovanni Ferrari, were selected in both finals). Pozzo also led Italy to the 1936 Olympics title. Born in Turin on 2 March 1886, Pozzo learned to love football as a student in England, watching Manchester United. He returned home reluctantly when his family bought him a return ticket for his sister's wedding and then refused to let him leave Italy again. Pozzo fired up his Italian team ahead of their 1938 semi-final against Brazil by revealing their opponents had already booked their plane to Paris for the final – Italy won 2-1.



ITALY'S NATIONAL COACHES

Coach	Years
Vittorio Pozzo	1912, 1924
Augusto Rangone	1925–28
Carlo Carcano	1928–29
Vittorio Pozzo	1929–48
Ferruccio Novo	1949–50
Carlino Beretta	1952–53
Giuseppe Viani	1960
Giovanni Ferrari	1960–61
Giovanni Ferrari/Paolo Mazza	1962
Edmondo Fabbri	1962–66
Helenio Herrera/ Ferruccio Valcareggi	1966–67
Ferruccio Valcareggi	1967–74
Fulvio Bernardini	1974–75
Enzo Bearzot	1975–86
Azeglio Vicini	1986–91
Arrigo Sacchi	1991–96
Cesare Maldini	1997–98
Dino Zoff	1998–2000
Giovanni Trapattoni	2000–04
Marcello Lippi	2004–06
Roberto Donadoni	2006–08
Marcello Lippi	2008–10
Cesare Prandelli	2010–14
Antonio Conte	2014-16
Gian Piero Ventura	2016-18
Roberto Mancini	2018-2022
Luciano Spalletti	2022-



COMEBACK KID

Paolo Rossi was the unlikely hero of Italy's 1982 FIFA World Cup triumph, winning the Golden Boot with six goals – including a memorable hat-trick against Brazil in the second round, and the first of Italy's three goals in their final win over West Germany. But he only just made it to the tournament at all, having completed a two-year ban for his alleged involvement in a betting scandal only six weeks before the start of the tournament.

HELPING HANDS

Goalkeeper Angelo Peruzzi was a 14-year-old ballboy at the 1984 European Cup final between Roma and Liverpool. He made 16 appearances for Roma before playing for Juventus, Internazionale and Lazio as well as 31 times for Italy between 1995 and 2006.

ONCE BITTEN, TWICE SHY

Italy crashed out of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil in the first round, just as they had done in South Africa four years earlier. After beating England in Manaus, they lost 1-0 to surprise group winners Costa Rica – their first FIFA World Cup defeat to a Central American nation in eight meetings. They then lost a decisive final game against Uruguay by the same scoreline, thanks to a late goal by Diego Godin – although the Italians were incensed opposing striker Luis Suarez was not sent off earlier for biting **Giorgio Chiellini** on the shoulder. The Italy vice-captain pulled down his shirt to show Mexican referee Marco Rodriguez the toothmarks left in his skin, but to no avail.

TOP CAPS

1	Gianluigi Buffon	176
2	Fabio Cannavaro	136
3	Paolo Maldini	126
4	Leonardo Bonucci	121
5	Giorgio Chiellini	117
=	Daniele De Rossi	117
7	Andrea Pirlo	116
8	Dino Zoff	112
9	Gianluca Zambrotta	98
10	Giacinto Facchetti	94

TOP SCORERS

1	Luigi Riva	35
2	Giuseppe Meazza	33
3	Silvio Piola	30
4	Roberto Baggio	27
=	Alessandro Del Piero	27
6	Alessandro Altobelli	25
=	Adolfo Baloncieri	25
=	Filippo Inzaghi	25
9	Francesco Graziani	23
=	Christian Vieri	23

MISTER INTER, GIACINTO

No Internazionale footballer will ever wear the No.3 shirt after it was retired in tribute to the legendary full-back **Giacinto Facchetti**, following his death in 2006 at the age of 64. He spent his entire senior career at Inter, between 1960 and 1978, and later served as the club's technical director and president. In his playing days he helped pioneer the role of a full-back as a stampeding, attacking presence – though favoured his right foot despite advancing on the left. He captained Italy 70 times, during his 94-cap international career and lifted the UEFA European Championship trophy in 1968.



ZOFF THE SCALE

Goalkeeper **Dino Zoff** set an international record by going 1,142 minutes without conceding a goal between September 1972 and June 1974. Zoff was Italy's captain when they won the 1982 FIFA World Cup – emulating the feat of another Juventus goalkeeper, Gianpiero Combi, who had been the victorious skipper in 1934. Zoff coached Italy to the final of the 2000 UEFA European Championship, which they lost 2-1 to France thanks to an extra-time "golden goal" – then quit a few days later, unhappy following the criticism levelled at him by Italy's then prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi.





SOMETIMES SUPER MARIO

Mario Balotelli is one of football's most explosive footballers – and not only because the fire brigade had to be called when fireworks were set off from the bathroom of his home the night before he scored in his club Manchester City's 6-1 trouncing of local rivals United. He marked his opening goal by revealing a T-shirt under his club kit bearing the question: "WHY ALWAYS ME?" His turbulent time in Manchester included a Premier League title but also a training-ground fight with manager Roberto Mancini and a reported £100,000 in parking fines. He was born in Palermo to Ghanaian parents, but health problems as a child prompted him to be adopted by an Italian couple when he was three, changing his name from Mario Barwuah to Mario Balotelli. He was given clearance to play for Italy when given citizenship at the age of 18 and was one of the country's star players at the 2012 UEFA European Championship, when he scored his first three international goals – including a decisive double against Germany in the semi-finals. But his volatile nature brought him a red card in a 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifier against the Czech Republic in June 2013 – and he lashed out at water bottles and then a brick wall after making his way off the pitch.

RIGHT CALL

Italy captain Giacinto Facchetti called correctly when their 1968 UEFA European Championship semi-final against the Soviet Union ended in a draw after extra-time (in the days before penalties) and had to be settled by the toss of a coin. The attacking left-back had luck on his side that time, then lifted the trophy after a 2-0 replay victory in the final against Yugoslavia. Facchetti, who also won the European Cup with Internazionale in 1964 and 1965, had an impressive scoring record for a defender, ending his career with 59 goals in 476 league appearances. He played on the left flank, even though he was a naturally right-footed player.



ROLLING RIVA

Italy's all-time top scorer is **Luigi 'Gigi' Riva**, who scored 35 goals in 42 appearances for his country. One of his most important strikes was the opening goal in the 1968 UEFA European Championship final win over Yugoslavia. Despite his prolific form after having switched from left-winger to striker, he never played for one of Italy's traditional club giants. Instead, Riva – born in Leggiuno on 7 November 1944 – spent his entire league career with unfashionable Sardinian club Cagliari, and at one point turned down a move to the mighty Juventus. His goals (21 of them) fired the club to their one and only league championship in 1970. Riva suffered his fair share of bad luck with injuries, breaking his left leg while playing for Italy in 1966, then his right leg in 1970, again when he was away on international duty.

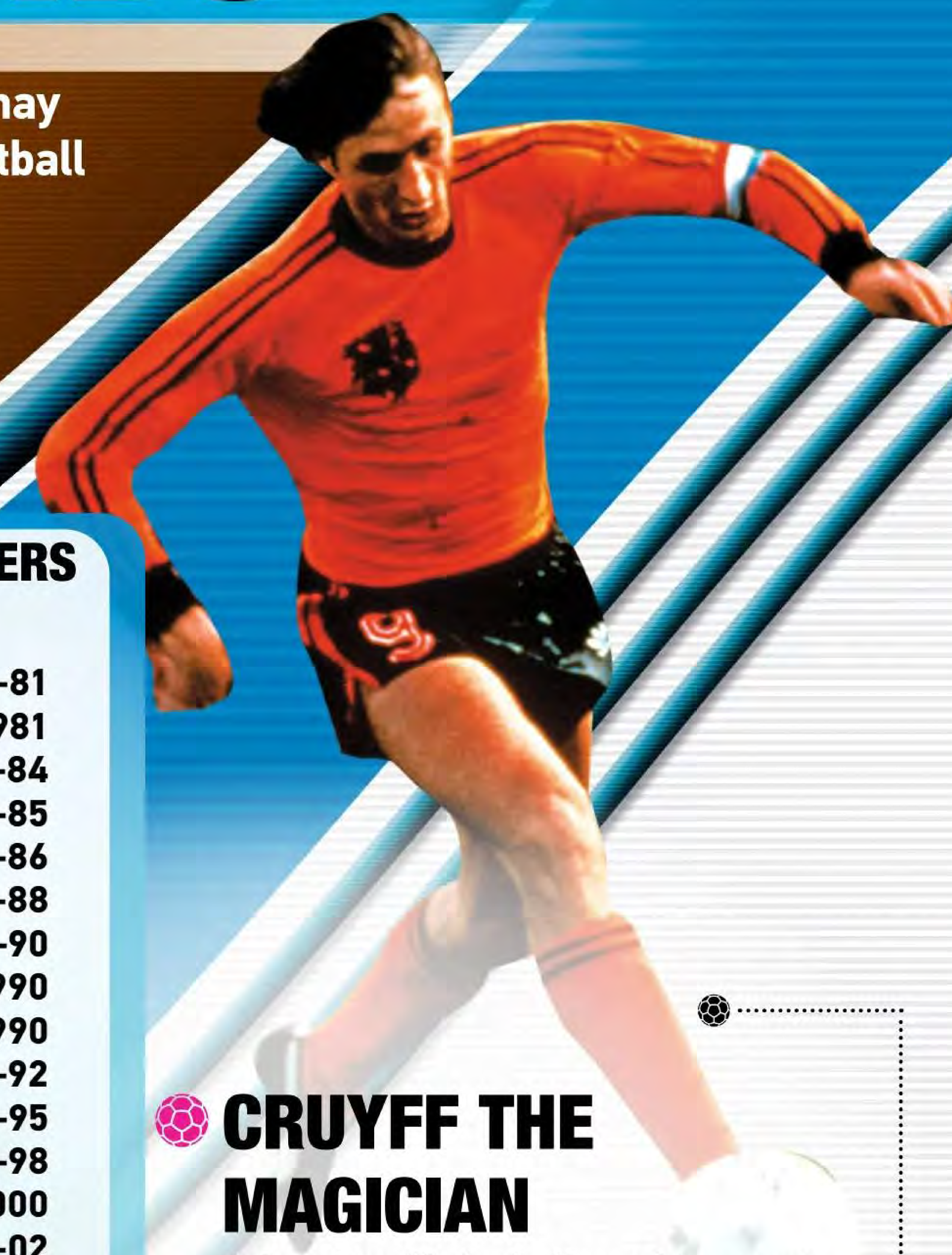


HAPPY CENTENARY

After captaining Italy to the 2006 FIFA World Cup title, **Fabio Cannavaro** was named FIFA World Player of the Year – at 33, the oldest winner of the prize, as well as the first defender. Cannavaro, born in Naples in 1973, played every minute of the 2006 tournament and the final triumph against France was the ideal way to celebrate his 100th international appearance.

NETHERLANDS

The walled banks of orange-shirted Netherlands fans may have become a regular feature at the world's major football tournaments, but that has not always been the case. It wasn't until the 1970s, with Johan Cruyff and his team's spectacular brand of Total Football, that the country possessed a side worthy of the modern legend. They won the UEFA European Championship in 1988 and have regularly challenged for the game's major honours.



NETHERLANDS MANAGERS (SINCE 1978)

Manager	Years
Jan Zwartkruis	1978–81
Rob Baan	1981
Kees Rijvers	1981–84
Rinus Michels	1984–85
Leo Beenhakker	1985–86
Rinus Michels	1986–88
Thijs Libregts	1988–90
Nol de Ruiter	1990
Leo Beenhakker	1990
Rinus Michels	1990–92
Dick Advocaat	1992–95
Guus Hiddink	1995–98
Frank Rijkaard	1998–2000
Louis van Gaal	2000–02
Dick Advocaat	2002–04
Marco van Basten	2004–08
Bert van Marwijk	2008–12
Louis van Gaal	2012–14
Guus Hiddink	2014–15
Danny Blind	2015–17
Dick Advocaat	2017–18
Ronald Koeman	2018–20
Frank de Boer	2020–21
Louis van Gaal	2021–22
Ronald Koeman	2023–



MICHELS THE MASTER

Rinus Michels (1928–2005) was named FIFA's Coach of the Century in 1999 for his achievements with the Netherlands and Ajax. The former Ajax and Netherlands striker took over the manager's job at his old club in 1965 and began creating the side that would dominate European football in the early 1970s. Michels built the team around Johan Cruyff – as he later did with the national side – and introduced the concept known as "Total Football". He moved to Barcelona after Ajax's 1971 European Cup victory, but he was called back to mastermind the Netherlands' 1974 FIFA World Cup bid. Nicknamed "The General", he was known as a disciplinarian who could impose order on the many different factions within the Dutch dressing room. Michels used that skill to great effect after taking over the national team again for their 1988 UEFA European Championship campaign. In the finals, the Dutch beat England and the Republic of Ireland to reach the last four, then knocked out hosts West Germany before beating the Soviet Union 2-0 in the final. Michels took charge for a third spell as manager when the Netherlands reached the semi-finals of Euro 92.

CRUYFF THE MAGICIAN

Johan Cruyff's footballing achievements made him the most famous Dutchman ever. Cruyff (born in Amsterdam on 25 April 1947) was the catalyst for the rise of both Ajax and the national team. As one Dutch paper wrote before the 1974 FIFA World Cup final: "Cruyff woke up the Netherlands and took us to a world-class level." His great opponent, Franz Beckenbauer, said: "He is the best player to have come from Europe." Cruyff joined Ajax as a ten-year-old and made his league debut at 17. He led them to eight championships and the European Cup three years in a row. He and coach Rinus Michels also developed the style of playing known as "Total Football", which became a trademark for club and country. Cruyff made his national debut, against Hungary, on 7 September 1966. He scored 33 goals in 48 appearances and captained his country 33 times. He was named Player of the Tournament in the 1974 FIFA World Cup finals and was voted European Player of the Year three times. Sadly he died in 2016 after a battle with cancer.





THIS ONE GOES UP TO ELEVEN

The Netherlands' biggest-ever win was an 11-0 thrashing of San Marino in September 2011 during a UEFA European Championship qualifier in Eindhoven. Robin van Persie scored four, while there were braces for **Wesley Sneijder** and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, and goals apiece for Dirk Kuyt, John Heitinga and Georginio Wijnaldum, who made his international debut as an 86th-minute substitute and scored within four minutes.

LOUIS LOUIS

Louis van Gaal returned for a second spell as Netherlands coach after the 2012 UEFA European Championship. He has enjoyed great success at clubs around Europe, winning the UEFA Champions League with Ajax, two La Liga titles with Barcelona and the Bundesliga with Bayern Munich. After the 2014 FIFA World Cup he took over as manager of Manchester United. The Dutch are no strangers to reappointing former coaches: Karel Kaufman, Friedrich Donenfeld, Leo Beenhakker, Dick Advocaat and Rinus Michels all had more than one spell – and Michels had four. Van Gaal was succeeded by Guus Hiddink, his second spell, too, having been national coach 1995–98. Then, in the summer of 2021, van Gaal returned for his third stint in the Dutch dugout!

ALL CHANGE FOR THE ORANJE

Ten of the 11 men who started the 2010 FIFA World Cup final were in the Dutch squad for a disastrous UEFA European Championship in 2012. They lost all three first-round games and missed the knock-out stages of a major tournament for the first time since failing to qualify for Euro 2004. Things improved dramatically at the 2014 FIFA World Cup as the Netherlands finished third after losing the semi-final to Argentina in a penalty shoot-out. Only nine members of the 23-man Euro 2012 squad made it to Brazil 2014. The most memorable Dutch display in Brazil came in their opening match: avenging their 2010 FIFA World Cup final defeat by demolishing champions Spain 5-1 in Salvador. **Robin van Persie**'s fantastic diving header from the edge of the area that looped over goalkeeper Iker Casillas was the highlight. Van Persie thus became the first Dutchman to score at three separate FIFA World Cups. The 2014 FIFA World Cup was the first one which the Netherlands ended with a win: their 3-0 third-place play-off defeat of hosts Brazil. This set another record as the Netherlands became the first country to beat Brazil in FIFA World Cup finals three times.

GOALS GALORE

Only four players have scored five goals in a game for the Netherlands: Jan Vos, as Finland were crushed 9-0 in July 1912; Leen Vente, in a 9-3 defeat of Belgium in March 1934; John Bosman, in an 8-0 home trouncing of Cyprus in October 1987; and Marco van Basten, in an 8-0 win in Malta in December 1990. Bosman scored three separate hat-tricks for the Dutch, as did Mannes Francken, Beb Bakhuys and Faas Wilkes. Two of Wilkes' trebles were scored in 1946 – the third came a full 13 years later.



HERO HAPPEL

Ernst Happel is second only to Rinus Michels for his coaching achievements with Dutch teams. The former Austria defender made history by steering Feyenoord to the European Cup in 1970 – the first Dutch side to win the trophy. He was drafted in to coach the Netherlands at the 1978 FIFA World Cup finals after guiding Belgian side Brugge to the European Cup final. In Johan Cruyff's absence, Happel drew the best from Ruud Krol, Johan Neeskens and Arie Haan as the Netherlands reached the final before losing in extra-time to Argentina in Buenos Aires.

VAN BASTEN'S TOURNAMENT

Marco van Basten was the hero of the Netherlands' 1988 UEFA European Championship success. He netted a hat-trick to see off England in the group games, scored a semi-final winner against West Germany, and then cracked a spectacular flying volley to clinch a 2-0 victory over the Soviet Union in the final. The Dutch forward also starred in Italy's Serie A with AC Milan, and was twice the league's top scorer before persistent ankle trouble ended his career prematurely.



HANGING AROUND

Sander Boschker waited a long time for his full introduction to international football, but set two Dutch records when finally coming on as a second-half substitute against Ghana in a June 2010 friendly. At the age of 39 years and 256 days, he was not only the oldest Dutchman to win his first cap – but also the oldest Dutch international ever. That remains his only cap… so far.

FLYING FEAR DENIED BERGKAMP MORE CAPS

Dennis Bergkamp would have won many more than 79 caps, but for his fear of flying. Bergkamp refused to board aircraft after the Netherlands squad were involved in a bomb hoax incident during the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the United States. He missed every away game for the Netherlands and his clubs unless he could reach the venue by road, rail or boat.



DIFFERENT SIDES OF SNEIJDER

Wesley Sneijder was hoping to achieve an unprecedented quintuple when his Netherlands team took on Spain in the 2010 FIFA World Cup final. No footballer had ever before won the FIFA World Cup in the same season as a domestic league and cup double and the UEFA Champions League or European Cup – let alone adding the FIFA World Cup Golden Boot. Sneijder won the 2009–10 treble with his club side Internazionale before only just missing out on the FIFA World Cup and the Golden Boot. Despite his FIFA World Cup final heartbreak, Sneijder did enjoy some romantic solace six days after defeat to Spain, when he married Dutch actress and TV presenter Yolanthe Cabau van Kasbergen.

VORM WELCOME

The Netherlands became the first country to use all 23 squad players at a FIFA World Cup, when sub keeper Michel Vorm came on for Jasper Cillessen during stoppage-time of their third-place play-off against Brazil. Cillessen set another record as the first goalkeeper to be substituted twice in one tournament. Earlier in the competition, Robin van Persie's suspension from their final first-round match against Chile meant the Dutch played without a single player named 'van' for the first time since 1996, a run lasting 221 matches.

NEESKENS'S EARLY GOAL

The Netherlands took a first-minute lead in the 1974 World Cup final without a West German player having touched the ball. The Dutch built a move of 14 passes from the kick-off and Johan Cruyff was tripped in the box by Uli Hoeness. Johan Neeskens converted the first penalty in a World Cup final history … but they still went on to lose.

KRUL TO BE KIND

Louis van Gaal pulled a masterstoke when he replaced goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen with **Tim Krul** in the 119th minute of the Netherlands' quarter-final against Costa Rica in the 2014 FIFA World Cup. He reasoned that the Dutch stood a better chance of winning the resulting shoot-out with Krul between the sticks as he is two inches taller than Cillessen. Sure enough, Krul saved two penalties and the Dutch went through. Enforced substitutions during the semi-final against Argentina meant van Gaal could not repeat the trick and Cillessen was unable to emulate Krul's earlier heroics.



THE BATTLE OF LUSAIL

The Netherland's quarter-final clash against Argentina at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar was always going to be a fiesty affair, but few could have predicted that an ill-tempered game would result in a FIFA tournament record 18 yellow cards and one red. After the game finished 2-2 and extra-time couldn't find a winner Argentina emerged triumphant in a tense penalty shootout.



THE WINNING CAPTAIN

With his distinctive dreadlocks, Ruud Gullit cut a swathe through world football through the 1980s and '90s. Twice a European Cup winner with AC Milan and a former European Footballer of the Year, he will always be remembered fondly by the Dutch fans as being the first man in a Netherlands shirt to lift a major trophy – the 1988 UEFA European Championship.

NETHERLANDS' EURO STARS

Three Dutch players have won the European Footballer of the Year award: Johan Cruyff, **Ruud Gullit** and Marco van Basten. Cruyff picked up the award in 1971, 1973 and 1974; Gullit was honoured in 1987, and Van Basten was chosen in 1988, 1989 and 1992.



TOP SCORERS

1	Robin van Persie	50
2	Memphis Depay	46
3	Klaas-Jan Huntelaar	42
4	Patrick Kluivert	40
5	Dennis Bergkamp	37
=	Arjen Robben	37
7	Ruud van Nistelrooy	35
=	Faas Wilkes	35
9	Johan Cruyff	33
=	Abe Lenstra	33

DE BOER BOYS SET RECORD

Twins Frank and Ronald de Boer hold the record for the most games played by brothers together for the Netherlands. Frank won 112 caps, while Ronald won 67.

TOP CAPS

1	Wesley Sneijder	134
2	Edwin van der Sar	130
3	Frank de Boer	112
4	Rafael van der Vaart	109
5	Daley Blind	108
6	Gio van Bronckhorst	106
7	Dirk Kuyt	104
8	Robin van Persie	102
9	Phillip Cocu	101
10	Memphis Depay	98



WORK OF VAART

Rafael van der Vaart became the fifth player to make 100 appearances for the Netherlands, following Edwin van der Sar, Frank de Boer, Giovanni van Bronckhorst and Philip Cocu. Yet for a while it looked as if van der Vaart might just miss out on the milestone: he ended the 2012 UEFA European Championship on 99 caps and coach Bert van Marwijk said he may be left out of future squads. But Van Marwijk's departure after Euro 2012 was a boost for van der Vaart, who made his 100th appearance in a 4-2 friendly loss to Belgium in August 2012. Van der Vaart had marked his 99th cap with a stunning long-range goal against Portugal in the Netherlands' final first-round game at Euro 2012, and hit a post, in the 2-1 defeat that ended Dutch interest earlier than expected. Sadly, a calf injury ruled him out of the 2014 FIFA World Cup three days before Louis van Gaal announced his 23-man squad.

SPAIN

Spain is home to some of Europe's strongest club sides and has produced some of football's biggest names. For years, however, the national team was considered the game's biggest underachievers (*La Roja's* only success being the 1964 UEFA European Championship). Things changed in 2008 when Spain won the UEFA European Championship, its first international success for 44 years. Even better came with victory in the 2010 FIFA World Cup, and an unprecedented third straight major trophy when the European crown was retained in 2012. But a disappointing first-round exit at the 2014 FIFA World Cup saw the great run end, and the 2018 edition also ended in defeat, this time to hosts Russia on spotkicks. At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Spain once again lost on penalties, this time to Morocco. However, a new-look side won EURO 2024.



'FALSE NINE'

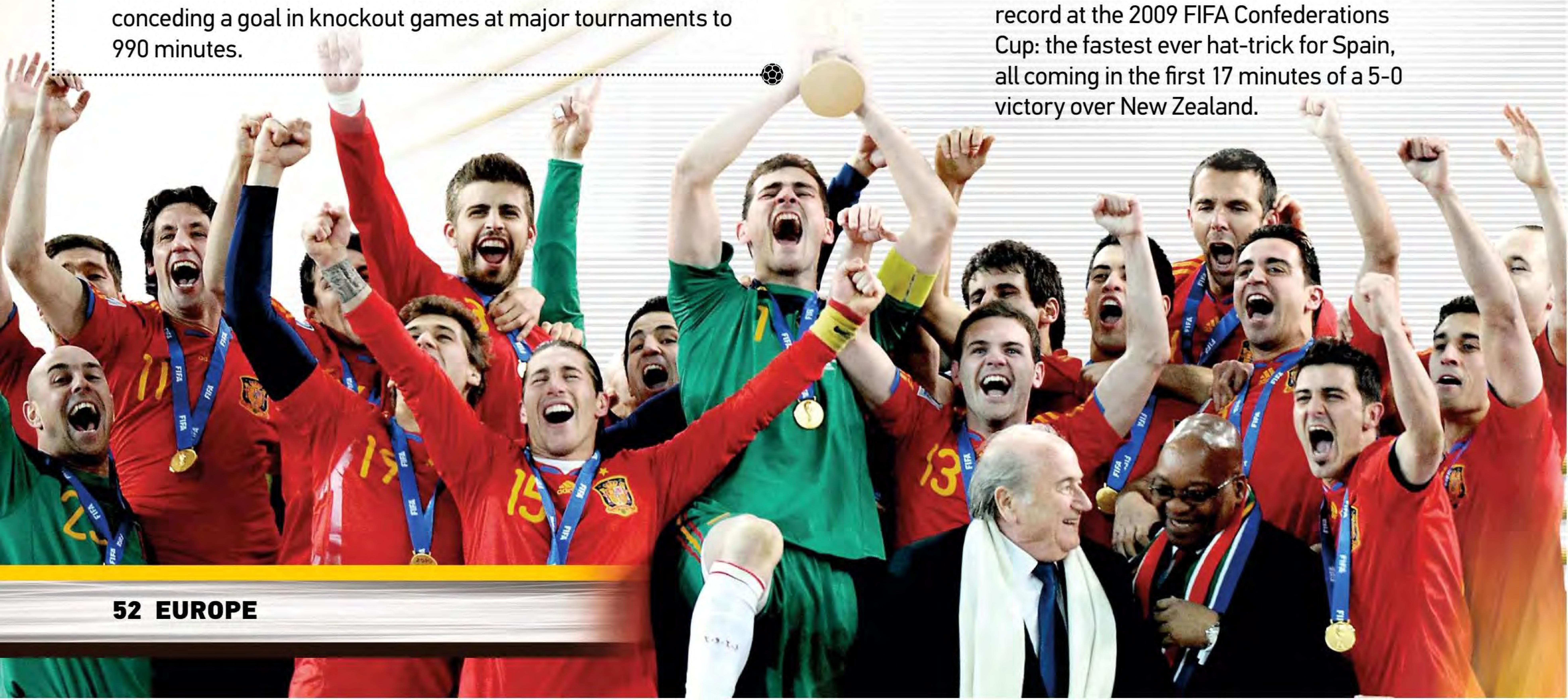
Spain not only began and ended their Euro 2012 campaign against Italy, but also became the first team to win a UEFA European Championship fielding the same starting XI in their opening game as in the final. Perhaps even more surprising was that Vicente del Bosque's men won the tournament so convincingly despite kicking off without an orthodox striker, preferring a 4-6-0 formation with midfielder **Cesc Fabregas** deployed as a 'false nine'.

DOUBLING UP

Spain's 2010 FIFA World Cup triumph made them the first country since West Germany in 1974 to lift the trophy as the reigning European champions. When France combined the two titles, they did it the other way around, by winning the 1998 FIFA World Cup and then the UEFA European Championship two years later. Yet no country had won three major tournaments in a row until Spain won Euro 2012, trouncing Italy 4-0 in the final. This also made Spain the first team to make a successful defence of their UEFA European Championship title. That scoreline was also the largest victory in a FIFA World Cup or UEFA European Championship final. The clean sheet in the final also stretched their run without conceding a goal in knockout games at major tournaments to 990 minutes.

THREE AND EASY

David Villa and Fernando Torres share Spain's record for most hat-tricks, with three. They even managed one apiece in the same match, the 10-0 crushing of Tahiti at the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup. It was Spain's third-largest victory, behind only a 13-0 win over Bulgaria in 1933 and a 12-1 rout of Malta in 1983. Torres set another record at the 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup: the fastest ever hat-trick for Spain, all coming in the first 17 minutes of a 5-0 victory over New Zealand.



GROUNDS FOR APPEAL

No single country has provided more venues when hosting a FIFA World Cup finals than the 17 stadiums – in 14 cities – used by Spain in 1982. The 2002 tournament was played at 20 different venues but ten were in Japan and ten in South Korea. The 1982 competition was the first FIFA World Cup to be expanded from 16 to 24 teams. The final was played in Madrid's Estadio Santiago Bernabeu.

RIGHT SAID FRED

When Spain came back from 2-0 and then 3-2 down to win 4-3 in Madrid in May 1929, they became the first non-British team to beat England. Spain's victory, in the Estadio Metropolitano, came with the help of their English coach Fred Pentland, who had moved to Spain in 1920. He had most success with Athletic Bilbao, leading them to league and cup doubles in 1930 and 1931 – and inflicting Barcelona's worst-ever defeat, a 12-1 rout in 1931.



NOT TOO SHABBY XABI

Passmaster Xabi Alonso scored both goals as Spain beat France 2-0 in their 2012 UEFA European Championship quarter-final – an ideal way for him to celebrate a day in which he became the fifth Spaniard, after Iker Casillas, Raul, Xavi and Andoni Zubizarreta, to make 100 international appearances. The central midfielder's father Periko Alonso won 21 Spanish caps as well as three La Liga titles – two with Real Sociedad and one with Barcelona, though Xabi would later play for Barca's arch-rivals Real Madrid. Xabi's brother Mikel and half-brother Marcos are both professional footballers, while another brother Jon is a referee.

NO DEFENCE

Spain went into the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil aiming not only to successfully retain their crown but also to clinch a historic fourth successive international title, having won the UEFA European Championship in 2008 and 2012. Yet their defence was a disaster – despite taking the lead against the Netherlands in their opening game through a **Xabi Alonso** penalty, they lost the match 5-1: the heaviest FIFA World Cup finals defeat any reigning champion have suffered. A 2-0 defeat to Chile made them the first defending champions to be eliminated with a game remaining, though they gained a token consolation with a 3-0 defeat of Australia. The competition brought to an end the otherwise-glorious international careers of players such as Xavi Hernandez and David Villa.

MAJOR TOURNAMENTS

FIFA WORLD CUP:
16 appearances – winners 2010

UEFA EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP:
12 appearances – winners 1964, 2008, 2012, 2024

FIRST INTERNATIONAL:
Spain 1 Denmark 0 (Brussels, Belgium, 28 August 1920)

BIGGEST WIN:
Spain 13 Bulgaria 0 (Madrid, 21 May 1933)

BIGGEST DEFEAT:
Italy 7 Spain 1 (Amsterdam, Netherlands, 4 June 1928); England 7 Spain 1 (London, England, 9 December 1931)

RED ALERT

Spain refused to play in the first UEFA European Championship in 1960, in protest at having to travel to the Soviet Union, a Communist country. But they changed their minds four years later, not only hosting the tournament but also winning it – by beating the visiting Soviets 2-1 in the final. Spain were captained by Fernando Olivella and managed by Jose Villalonga, who had been the first coach to win the European Cup, with Real Madrid in 1956.

WISE HEAD, OLD SHOULDERS

In 2008, a month short of his 70th birthday, Spain's **Luis Aragones** – full name Luis Aragones Suarez – became the oldest coach to win the UEFA European Championship. A former centre-forward and known only as "Luis" during his playing days, he won 11 caps for Spain. As coach, the "Wise Man of Hortaleza" won 38 matches between 2004 and 2008 – a national record since beaten by his successor Vicente Del Bosque. Aragones died from leukaemia on 1 February 2014, aged 75. Tributes were paid across football, but especially at his former club Atletico Madrid who, that same weekend, went top of La Liga for the first time since 1995–96 – when Aragones was coach. Atletico later won their first title since 1996. The players also wore his name embroidered in gold inside the collars of their shirts during the 2014 UEFA Champions League final.





TORRES! TORRES!

As a child, **Fernando Torres** wanted to be a goalkeeper but made the wise decision to become a striker instead. He has a penchant for scoring the only goal in the final of a tournament, doing so in the 2008 UEFA European Championship, for Spain against Germany in Vienna, having done the same in the Under-16 UEFA European Championship in 2001 and for the Under-19s the following year. Torres became the most expensive Spanish footballer ever when Chelsea paid €58.5million to sign him from fellow English club Liverpool in January 2011. In 2012, Torres became the first player to score in the final of two different UEFA European Championships, when he came on as a substitute and found the net against Italy. Torres's goal in Spain's 3-0 victory over Australia in June 2014 was his first at a FIFA World Cup finals since Germany 2006. He thus became the ninth Spanish player to have scored four FIFA World Cup goals.

TOP CAPS

1	Sergio Ramos	180
2	Iker Casillas	167
3	Sergio Busquets	143
4	Xavi Hernandez	133
5	Andres Iniesta	131
6	Andoni Zubizarreta	126
7	David Silva	125
8	Xabi Alonso	114
9	Cesc Fabregas	110
=	Fernando Torres	110

TOP SCORERS

1	David Villa	59
2	Raul Gonzalez	44
3	Fernando Torres	38
4	Alvaro Morata	36
5	David Silva	35
6	Fernando Hierro	29
7	Fernando Morientes	27
8	Emilio Butragueno	26
9	Sergio Ramos	23
=	Alfredo Di Stefano	23



HAPPY HERNANDEZ

Relentlessly precise passer **Xavi Hernandez** has proved himself a more than worthy heir to Pep Guardiola at the heart of the Barcelona and Spain midfields. As well as winning the UEFA Champions League with his club in 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2015, he was voted Player of the Tournament when Spain won the 2008 UEFA European Championship, and starred as *La Roja* claimed the FIFA World Cup crown two years later and retained their European crown in 2012. Xavi was third, behind club mate Lionel Messl, in the 2010 and 2011 FIFA Ballon d'Or voting. Yet he nearly left Barcelona for Italy's AC Milan when aged just 17 – though Xavi was not keen on the proposed move and later expressed his relief at staying in Spain.

BEST CAS SCENARIO

Spain suffered a rare defeat when goalkeeper and captain Iker Casillas equalled the national record for most international appearances, in a 1-0 friendly defeat to England in November 2011. *La Roja* then drew 2-2 with Costa Rica three days later when he broke the record. Seven months later Casillas was lifting a third trophy in a row, at Euro 2012 – and extending not just his international appearances record but several more. The 4-0 Euro 2012 final victory over Italy made him the first footballer to reach a century of international wins. It was also his 78th clean sheet for his country, more than any other goalkeeper has achieved – the closest challenger was the Netherlands' Edwin van der Sar, on 72. The pair now share the record – nine – for the most UEFA European Championship clean sheets. Casillas went 821 minutes without conceding a goal for Spain until Olivier Giroud scored for France in a FIFA World Cup qualifier in October 2012.

SAVING FOR A REINA DAY

Jose 'Pepe' Reina finally saw action in the FIFA World Cup – at his third finals – when picked for Spain's 3-0 victory over Australia in June 2014. He had been an unused member at Germany 2006 and South Africa 2010. It was Reina's 34th appearance for Spain since making his debut in 2005. His father, Manuel Reina, also a goalkeeper, played in five internationals between 1969 and 1973.





VILLA FILLS HIS BOOTS

David Villa became Spain's all-time top scorer in FIFA World Cups with his first-round goal against Chile in 2010, his sixth overall across the 2006 and 2010 tournaments. Villa also became the first Spaniard to miss a penalty in a FIFA World Cup match, when he wasted the chance of a hat-trick against Honduras, also in 2010, by putting his spot-kick wide. Spain had scored their previous 14 FIFA World Cup penalties, not counting shoot-outs. Villa became Spain's all-time leading scorer with a brace against the Czech Republic in March 2011, but a broken leg ruled him out of the 2012 UEFA European Championship, thus missing out on adding to his Euro 2008 and 2010 FIFA World Cup winners' medals. Villa retired from international football as Spain departed the 2014 FIFA World Cup, signing off with a neat backheel goal against Australia – his 59th international strike in 97 appearances and the first backheeled goal at a FIFA World Cup since Austria's Bruno Pezzey against Northern Ireland in 1982.

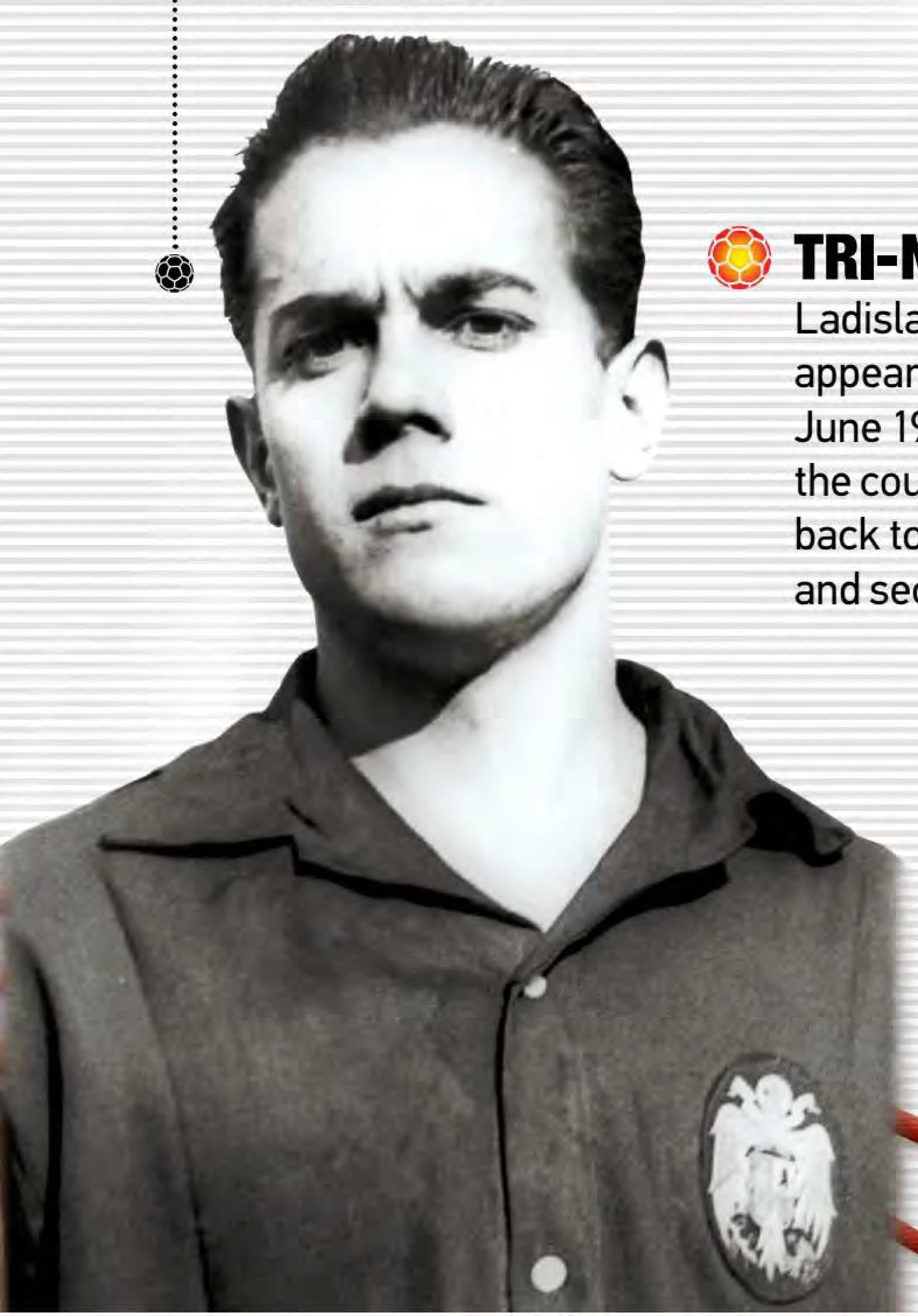
SERGING SERGIO

Sergio Ramos became the youngest-ever European player to reach 100 international caps, in March 2013, at the age of 26 years and 358 days – and marked the occasion by scoring the opening goal in a 1-1 draw with Finland. He claimed the record from Germany's Lukas Podolski, who was 21 days older when he reached his century of caps. South Korea's Cha Bum-Kun, who was 24 years and 139 days old when he achieved the landmark, holds the global record. Ramos, who can play both at right-back or in central defence, was a member of the Spain team that won the 2008 and 2012 UEFA European Championships, as well as the 2010 FIFA World Cup. He held those trophies in safer hands than he had done when he raised the Spanish Copa del Rey, won by his club Real Madrid, during an open-top bus tour in April 2011: on that occasion, he dropped the cup from the upper deck and saw it crushed beneath the bus's wheels.



FIT FOR PURPOSE

Luis Suarez played through injury for Spain in the 1964 UEFA European Championship final – luckily for his team-mates, since he set up both goals in a 2-1 triumph. He was named European Footballer of the Year in 1960 – the only Spanish-born player to have taken the prize.



TRI-NATIONS

Ladislav Kubala played for not one, not two, but three different countries – though he never appeared in the finals of a major international tournament. Despite being born in Budapest on 10 June 1927, he made his international debut for Czechoslovakia in 1946 – winning five more caps for the country of his parents' birth. He then appeared three times for birthplace Hungary after moving back to the country in 1948, before playing 19 games for Spain after leaving Hungary as a refugee and securing a transfer to Barcelona in 1951.

VICTORY MARCH

Centre-back Carlos Marchena became the first footballer to go 50 internationals in a row unbeaten, when he played in Spain's 3-2 victory over Saudi Arabia in May 2009 – one more than Brazil's 1950s and 1960s winger Garrincha. Marchena was a member of Spain's successful 2010 FIFA World Cup squad, ending the tournament on 54 consecutive internationals without defeat. Marchena's 57-game unbeaten run came to an end when Argentina beat Spain 4-1 in September 2010.

BELGIUM

Belgium – nicknamed 'The Red Devils' – embarked on a golden period in the Eighties after eight decades spent on the fringes of international competition: first a runners-up finish at the 1980 UEFA European Championship, followed by a run to the semi-finals of the 1986 FIFA World Cup. A new crop of elite European stars did, however, help Belgium to reach the 2014 FIFA World Cup quarter-finals – in their first finals appearance since 2002. Belgium then went one better in 2018, reaching the semi-finals, where they lost 1-0 to eventual winners France.



BELGIAN LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP WINS

34	Anderlecht
19	Club Brugge
11	Union Saint-Gilloise
10	Standard Liege
7	Beerschot
6	Racing de Bruxelles
5	RFC de Liege
5	Daring de Bruxelles
5	R Antwerp FC
4	KV Mechelen
4	Lierse SK
4	KRC Genk
3	Cercle Brugge KSV
2	KSK Beveren
1	RWD Molenbeek
1	KAA Gent

ERWIN-WIN SITUATION

Belgium caused a sensation in the opening match of the 1982 FIFA World Cup by defeating the reigning champions Argentina, 1-0, thanks to a 62nd-minute goal by striker **Erwin Vandenburgh** in Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium. The same opponents had their revenge four years later, when two unanswered goals by Diego Maradona were enough to put Argentina into the 1986 FIFA World Cup final. Vandenburgh had also scored in Belgium's opening game of that tournament, a 2-1 Group B defeat to hosts Mexico.

SIXTH SENSE

By qualifying for the 2002 FIFA World Cup, Belgium became the first country to reach six successive tournaments without benefiting once from being either hosts or defending holders.



HE'S OUR GUY

Unquestionably Belgium's greatest manager – as well as their longest-serving – was **Guy Thys**. He led them to the final of the 1980 UEFA European Championship and – with a team featuring the likes of Enzo Scifo and Nico Claesen – the semi-finals of the FIFA World Cup six years later. He spent 13 years in the job from 1976 to 1989, then returned for a second spell just eight months after quitting. He stepped down again after managing Belgium at the 1990 FIFA World Cup. During his playing days in the 1940s and 1950s, he was a striker and won two caps for Belgium. He died at the age of 80 in August 2003.

DIVOCK'S DIVIDEND

Divock Origi was a late choice for Belgium's 2014 FIFA World Cup squad, picked by manager Marc Wilmots to replace the injured Christian Benteke. He justified that faith with the only goal of Belgium's second game, in the 88th minute, against Russia, half an hour after coming on as a substitute. Aged 19 years and 65 days, he became Belgium's youngest FIFA World Cup goalscorer. Divock's father, Mike Origi, was an international for his native Kenya, but spent most of his career in Belgium, where Divock was born and raised. Belgium's oldest FIFA World Cup scorer remains centre-back Leo Clijsters, aged 33 years and 250 days. He headed the opener in a 3-1 win over Uruguay at Italia 90.



CUP CONSOLATIONS

Belgium lost in the second round of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, beaten 2-0 by eventual champions Brazil. But there was some solace as Belgium won the tournament's fair play prize, and they were complemented by coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, who said Belgium were Brazil's toughest opponents en route to lifting the trophy.

TRIUMPHS AND TRAGEDY

The largest football venue in Belgium is the 50,000-capacity **King Baudouin Stadium** in Brussels, which opened under its previous name of the Jubilee Stadium on 23 August 1930 then took the name of Heysel in 1946. It was the scene of tragedy in 1985 when a wall collapsed and 39 fans died in disturbances while attending the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus. The stadium was rebuilt and given its current name in 1995. When Belgium and the Netherlands co-hosted the 2000 UEFA European Championship, the stadium staged the opening ceremony and first match, Belgium's 2-1 victory over Sweden. It is now used for Belgium's home internationals.

BARON RUN

The first man given honorary membership of world football's governing body FIFA was Baron Edouard de Laveleye. The Belgian was rewarded for persuading The Football Association in England to join FIFA in 1905 rather than remain independent. De Laveleye was the first chairman of the Belgian FA, founded in 1895, and stayed in post for 29 years. He was also the founder and first chairman of the Belgian Olympic Committee and successfully campaigned for Antwerp to stage the Games in 1920.

CLUB MATES

Belgium ended a 1964 match against neighbours and rivals the Netherlands with a team entirely comprised of Anderlecht players, after Liege goalkeeper Guy Delhasse was substituted by the Brussels club's Jean Trappeniers.

LONGEST-SERVING COACHES*

1. Guy Thys (1976–89, 1990–91)
2. William Maxwell (1910–13, 1920–28)
3. Constant Vanden Stock (1958–68)
4. Raymond Goethals (1968–76)
5. Roberto Martinez (2016–2022)
6. Bill Gormlie (1947–53)
7. Jack Butler (1935–40)
8. Paul Van Himst (1991–96)
9. Marc Wilmots (2012–16)
10. Hector Goetinck (1930–34)

FIVE STARS

A collection of players widely described as Belgium's "Golden Generation" helped the country achieve their finest run of victories at a FIFA World Cup when they won five consecutive matches at the 2018 finals and achieved their best World Cup finish. They defeated Panama 3-0, Tunisia 5-2 and England 1-0 in Group G before downing Japan 3-2 in the Round of 16 and Brazil 2-1 in the quarter-finals. Their fine run eventually ended with a 1-0 semi-final defeat to eventual winners France. Their 16 goals. which made them the tournament's top scorers, were spread between ten players: **Romelu Lukaku** (four), Eden Hazard (three), Michy Batshuayi, Nacer Chadli, Kevin De Bruyne, Marouane Fellaini, Adnan Januzaj, Dries Mertens, Thomas Meunier, Jan Vertonghen and an own goal by Brazil's Fernandinho (all one).



SWINE FEVER

Nicknamed 'The Fighting Pig', **Marc Wilmots** has hogged more goals for Belgium than all but two compatriots, Paul van Himst and Bernard Voorhoof. His 28 goals in 70 internationals between 1990 and 2002 included a Belgian record five at FIFA World Cups. After retiring, he spent a short spell as an elected Belgian senator before becoming assistant coach for the national team in 2009. When Georges Leekens suddenly resigned as Belgium coach in 2012, Wilmots was promoted to the top job. He not only successfully qualified Belgium for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, but also oversaw record runs of seven wins in a row and 14 consecutive games unbeaten, however, he was sacked following Belgium's poor showing at UEFA Euro 2016.



SPECS APPEAL

Most footballers with poor vision make do with contact lenses before going out to play, but Belgium captain Jef Jurion stood out in the late 1950s and early 1960s by wearing a pair of specially-made glasses during matches.

VOORHOOF'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

Belgium's scoring record is shared by Bernard Voorhoof and Paul van Himst, both on 30 goals – though Voorhoof's came in 61 games between 1928 and 1940, compared to van Himst's 81 matches from 1960 to 1974. Voorhoof is one of only five players to feature at all three of the pre-Second World War FIFA World Cups, in 1930, 1934 and 1938. The others were Edmond Delfour and Etienne Mattler of France, Nicolae Kovacs of Romania and Brazil's Patesko. Voorhoof's only FIFA World Cup goals were the two he scored in 1934. Van Himst went into management after retiring as a player in 1977, managing Anderlecht when they won the UEFA Cup in 1983 and taking Belgium to the 1994 FIFA World Cup.



SAINT MICHEL

Belgium goalkeeper Michel Preud'homme was the first man to win the Lev Yashin Award for the best goalkeeper at a FIFA World Cup, when it was introduced in 1994. Preud'homme's four displays – conceding four goals – impressed the panel of judges even though Belgium were knocked out in the second round in the USA. He was dubbed "Saint Michel" by supporters when playing for Portuguese club Benfica.



PRINCE FERNAND

Fernand Nisot was part of the Belgium team that won the football gold medal when Antwerp hosted the Olympic Games in 1920. He still holds the record for Belgium's youngest international, being just 16 years and 19 days old on his debut.

THE EDEN PROJECT

Dazzling playmaker **Eden Hazard** made himself one of the hottest properties in world football with his performances for French club Lille. In 2011 he became the youngest footballer to be named the country's player of the year and retained the award 12 months later, just before joining the then-reigning European champions Chelsea. The London club also signed Hazard's brother Thorgan, two years younger than him and a Belgium under-21 international. Eden Hazard – who has been compared to Belgian great **Enzo Scifo** and secured a dream move to Real Madrid in the summer of 2019 – made his full international debut at the age of 17 years and 316 days, becoming the eighth-youngest player to represent Belgium at full international level. The brothers are the sons of not just one former footballer but two. Their father, Thierry, played as a semi-professional and his mother Carine only retired from the women's game when she was pregnant with Eden.





COURT RISE

Belgium's 1-0 loss against Argentina in their 2014 FIFA World Cup quarter-final in Brasilia was goalkeeper **Thibaut Courtois**'s 22nd appearance for his country – but it was the first time the Red Devils had suffered defeat with him between the sticks. The 22-year-old had made a last-minute save from Lionel Messi, however, which extended to nine games the Argentine's barren run against him. Courtois went into the tournament having just helped Atletico Madrid win the Spanish league title and reach the UEFA Champions League final before being recalled from a three-year loan by his parent club Chelsea. His international debut had come against France in November 2011, when he not only kept a clean sheet in a goalless draw but also became Belgium's youngest ever goalkeeper – aged 19 years and 188 days.

TOP CAPS

1	Jan Vertonghen	157
2	Axel Witsel	132
3	Toby Alderweireld	127
4	Eden Hazard	126
5	Romelu Lukaku	119
6	Dries Mertens	109
7	Kevin De Bruyne	106
8	Thibaut Courtois	102
9	Jan Ceulemans	96
10	Timmy Simons	94



MOTHER'S BOY

Belgium's most-capped player, **Jan Ceulemans**, is unusual in having turned down a move to Italian giants AC Milan – and he did so on the advice of his mother. He opted to stay loyal to Club Brugge, where he spent most of his playing career, and became a national hero with his linchpin displays at three consecutive FIFA World Cups in 1982, 1986 and 1990. He scored three goals and was captain at Mexico 1986 as Belgium finished fourth. The Lier-born midfielder retired from international football after Belgium's second-round exit at the 1990 FIFA World Cup.



TOP SCORERS

1	Romelu Lukaku	85
2	Eden Hazard	33
3	Bernard Voorhoof	30
=	Paul van Himst	30
=	Kevin De Bruyne	30
6	Marc Wilmots	28
7	Michy Batshuayi	27
=	Joseph Mermans	27
9	Robert De Veen	26
=	Ray Braine	26

KOMPANY MAN

Belgium's former captain **Vincent Kompany** emerged as one of the most commanding centre-backs in world football and one of the most respected and articulate off the football field. He combined his professional career with part-time business administration studies at Manchester Business School. He captained Manchester City to their first English league title for 44 years in 2011-12, and when they won it in 2013-14, 2017-18 and 2018-19. Kompany was recalled by his club, SV Hamburg of Germany, and was forced to miss the semi-final of the men's Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Football tournament. Without him, Belgium lost 4-1 to Nigeria and, after losing 3-0 to Brazil in the third-place match, Belgium were denied a medal to add to the Olympic gold they won as hosts at Antwerp in 1920. Kompany was named Belgium's permanent captain in November 2011, replacing Thomas Vermaelen. He retired in 2020 and is now Bayern Munich's manager.

BULGARIA

The glory days of the 'golden generation' apart – when Bulgaria finished fourth at the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the United States, sensationally beating defending champions Germany 2-1 in the quarter-finals – a consistent pattern emerges with Bulgarian football. Once regular qualifiers for the game's major competitions, and the birthplace of some of the sport's biggest names (such as Hristo Stoichkov and Dimitar Berbatov), the country has too often failed to deliver on the big occasions and make its mark on world football.



TOP SCORERS

1	Dimitar Berbatov	48
=	Hristo Bonev	48
3	Hristo Stoichkov	37
4	Emil Kostadinov	27
5	Ljubomir Angelov	26
6	Ivan Kolev	25
=	Petar Zhekov	25
8	Nasko Sirakov	24
9	Atanas Mihaylov	23
10	Dimitar Milanov	20

A NATION MOURNS

Bulgaria lost two of its most popular footballing talents when a June 1971 car crash claimed the lives of strikers Georgi Asparukhov (28) and Nikola Kotkov (32). Asparukhov scored 19 goals in 50 internationals, including Bulgaria's only goal of the 1966 FIFA World Cup finals in a 3-1 defeat to Hungary.

MAYOR WITH NO HAIR

Balding Yordan Letchkov headed the winning goal against holders and defending champions Germany in the 1994 FIFA World Cup quarter-final in the United States. At the time, he played for German club Hamburg. He later became mayor of Sliven, the Bulgarian town where he was born in July 1967.

MOB RULES

Much-travelled Bulgaria centre-forward **Dimitar Berbatov** claims to have learned English by watching the *Godfather* movies. Berbatov joined Manchester United from Tottenham in 2008 for a club and Bulgarian record fee of £30.75m. Before joining Spurs, he had been a member of the Bayer Leverkusen side who narrowly missed out on a treble in 2002. They lost in the final of both the UEFA Champions League and the German cup and finished runners-up in the German Bundesliga. Berbatov surprised and disappointed fans back home when he announced his international retirement aged just 29, in May 2010, having scored a national-record 48 goals in his 78 appearances for Bulgaria. He briefly considered a return to the national team in 2012, but ultimately opted against the idea, saying that he wanted to "give chances to younger players". After joining Fulham in the summer of that year, he raised eyebrows during one match by revealing a T-shirt with the slogan: "Keep calm and pass me the ball."

TEETHING TROUBLES

Martin Petrov suffered a terrible start to his international career when he was sent off for two yellow cards just eight minutes into his debut as a substitute in a Euro 2000 qualifier against England. He broke down in tears when leaving the field, but recovered from the experience to become one of his country's most-capped players and enjoyed spells with top clubs such as Atletico Madrid in Spain and Manchester City in England. His 90 caps and 20 goals included Bulgaria's only strike at the 2004 UEFA European Championship, against Italy.



STAN THE BURGER VAN MAN

Stiliyan Petrov – nicknamed "Stan" by fans of his English club Aston Villa – was applauded onto the field when he became Bulgaria's first outfield player to reach 100 caps, against Switzerland in March 2011. The midfielder and Bulgaria captain has been playing in Britain since 1999, when he joined Scottish giants Celtic as a 20-year-old – but had to fight hard against a bout of homesickness. He later revealed that his English only improved when he started work behind the counter of a Scottish friend's burger van. Petrov said: "Some of the customers used to stare, thinking: 'That looks like Stiliyan Petrov, but it can't be.' But soon I started to understand things better." Tributes from across football and around the world poured in for Petrov when, in March 2012, he revealed he had been diagnosed with acute leukaemia. After 19 minutes of every home game for the rest of the season Villa fans stood and applauded for 60 seconds – 19 being his squad number.



TOP OF THE POPS

Ivelin Popov has eight international goals to his name. Sofia-born Popov trained with Feyenoord as a 17-year-old, when Netherlands legend Ruud Gullit was the Dutch club's manager, before making his name with Bulgarian team Litex Lovech. He was club captain by the age of 21 and was given the Bulgaria armband in 2012, aged 24. He was soon the skipper of both the national side and Russian club Kuban Krasnodar, who he joined in 2012.

PLAYING LUBO

Bulgaria's current coach is Lubo Penev, nephew of Dimitar Penev who had coached the country to their best-ever FIFA World Cup finish of fourth in 1994. Lubo, a centre-forward, missed out on that tournament after being diagnosed with testicular cancer, but he recovered to play for his country at both the 1996 UEFA European Championship and 1998 FIFA World Cup.

TOP CAPS

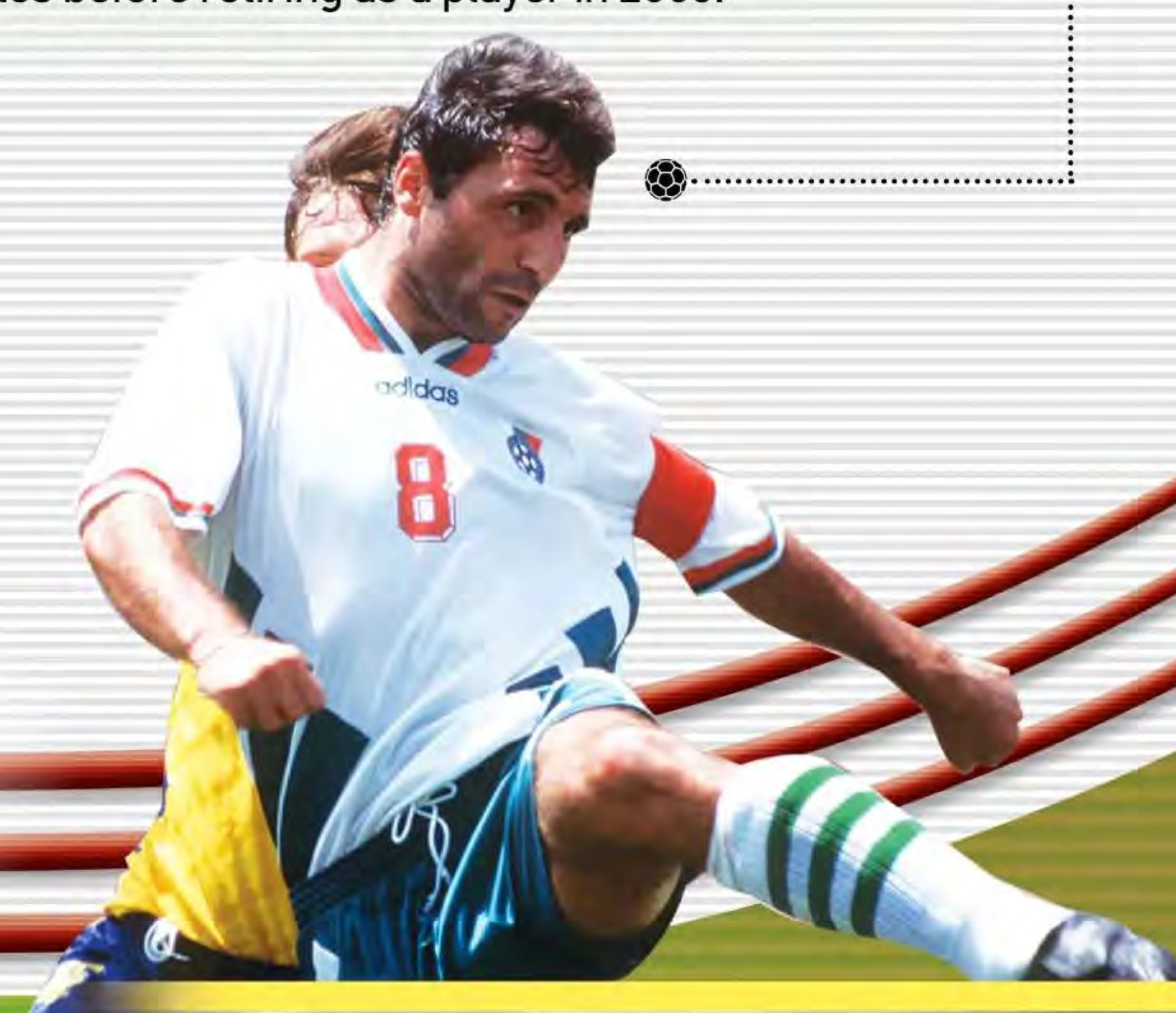
1	Stiliyan Petrov	105
2	Borislav Mikhailov	102
3	Hristo Bonev	96
4	Krasimir Balakov	92
5	Dimitar Penev	90
=	Ivelin Popov	90
=	Martin Petrov	90
8	Radostin Kishishev	88
9	Hristo Stoichkov	83
10	Zlatko Yankov	80

ALL-ROUNDER ALEKSANDAR

Defender Aleksandar Shalamanov played for Bulgaria at the 1966 FIFA World Cup, six years after representing his country as an alpine skier at the Winter Olympics at Lake Placid. He also went to the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics as an unused member of the volleyball squad. Shalamanov was voted Bulgaria's best sportsman in both 1967 and 1973.

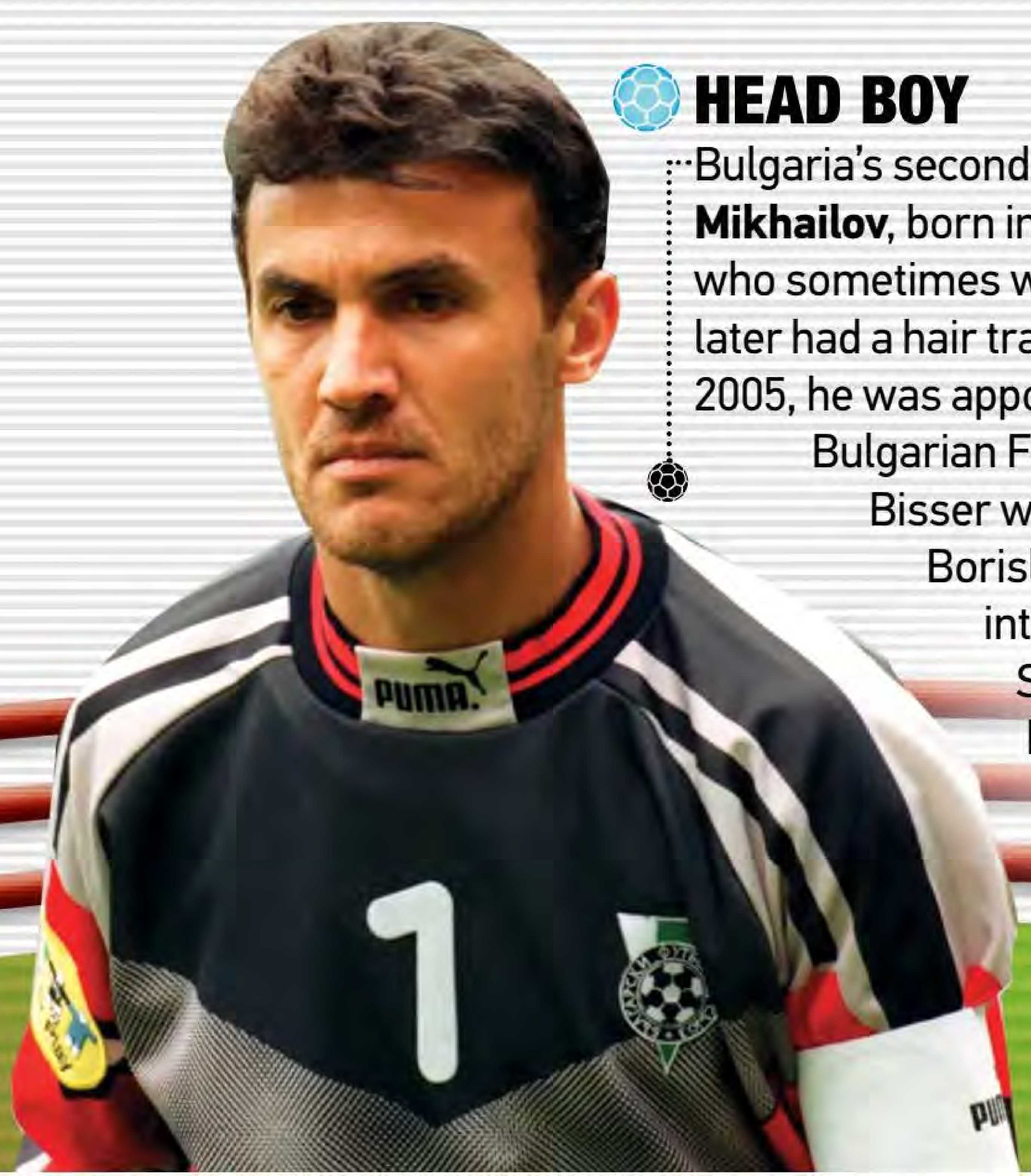
HRISTO'S HISTORY

Hristo Stoichkov, born in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, on 8 February 1968, shared the 1994 FIFA World Cup Golden Boot, awarded to the tournament's top scorer, with Russia's Oleg Salenko. Both scored six times, though Stoichkov became the sole winner of that year's European Footballer of the Year award. Earlier the same year, he had combined up-front with Brazilian Romario to help Barcelona reach the final of the UEFA Champions League. He was banned for a year after a brawl earlier in his career, during the 1985 Bulgarian cup final between CSKA Sofia and Levski Sofia. Stoichkov won trophies with clubs in Bulgaria, Spain, Saudi Arabia and the United States before retiring as a player in 2003.



HEAD BOY

Bulgaria's second most-capped player is **Borislav Mikhailov**, born in Sofia on 12 February 1963, who sometimes wore a wig while playing and later had a hair transplant. After retiring in 2005, he was appointed president of the Bulgarian Football Union. His father Bisser was also a goalkeeper and Borislav's son, Nikolay, made his international debut in goal against Scotland in May 2006. All three have played for Levski Sofia.



CROATIA



Croatia's distinctive red-and-white chequered jersey has become one of the most recognised in world football – just ask England. Croatia broke English hearts at the 2018 World Cup, beating the Three Lions 2-1 in extra time to reach a first-ever final. They would lose the game's biggest showpiece 4-2 to France, but they'd done a nation of 4 million proud. While Euro 2020 didn't go as well (Dalic's charges battled their way out of the group before losing 5-3 to Spain in a thriller), they enjoyed another successful World Cup in Qatar, stunning Brazil en route to the semi-finals.



TOP SCORERS

1	Davor Suker	45
2	Mario Mandzukic	33
=	Ivan Perisic	33
4	Eduardo da Silva	29
=	Andrej Kramaric	29
6	Luka Modric	27
7	Darijo Srna	22
8	Ivica Olic	20
9	Niko Kranjcar	16
10	Ivan Rakitic	15

ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

Slaven Bilic and Igor Stimac were formidable central defensive partners as Croatia finished third at the 1998 FIFA World Cup. Bilic was more successful as national coach, taking Croatia to the 2008 and 2012 UEFA European Championships during his six-year reign. Stimac took over in 2012, but an underwhelming 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign saw him replaced by another former international, **Niko Kovac**, for the play-off tie against Iceland in November 2013, which they won 2-0 on aggregate. However, Croatia went out in the first round in Brazil and Kovac was sacked in 2015, with Ante Cacic taking his place.



HAPPY OPENINGS

Few national teams have been as successful in their infancy as Croatia. Formerly part of Yugoslavia, Croatia reached the quarter-finals in their very first senior competition (UEFA Euro 96) and then came third at the 1998 FIFA World Cup. Since becoming eligible to participate in 1993, Croatia qualified for every FIFA World Cup (except for 2010) and missed only one UEFA European Championship (in 2000). Croatia have scored at least three goals at each of the seven UEFA European Championships for which they have qualified, in 1996, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020 and 2024. Their most prolific European Championships to date was in 2020, when Croatia fired in seven goals en route to the Round of 16. Unfortunately they couldn't recreate this form in 2024, crashing out in the group stages following a 3-0 defeat to Spain and draws with Albania and Italy.

GOLDEN LUKA

Luka Modric scored the fastest penalty in UEFA European Championship history: his fourth-minute strike was the only goal of Croatia's first-round victory against co-hosts Austria at the 2008 tournament. But he would miss one of the spot-kicks as Croatia lost a shoot-out to Turkey in the quarter-finals. His much-loved status back home remained unaffected though, and he repaid his fans' faith in spades a the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Helping to guide Croatia to their first World Cup final, Modric won the Golden Ball award, scoring twice and registering an assist before losing out in the final to a rampant France.

SUPER SUKER

Striker Davor Suker won the Golden Boot for being top scorer at the FIFA World Cup in 1998, scoring six goals in seven games as Croatia finished third. His strikes included the opening goal in Croatia's 2-1 semi-final defeat to eventual champions France, and the winner in a 2-1 triumph over Holland in the third-place play-off. Suker, by far his country's leading scorer of all time, had hit three goals at the UEFA European Championship in 1996 – including an audacious long-distance lob over Denmark goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel. Suker was named president of the Croatian Football Federation in July 2012.

TOP CAPS

1	Luka Modric	180
2	Ivan Perisic	136
3	Darijo Srna	134
4	Stipe Pletikosa	114
5	Ivan Rakitic	106
=	Mateo Kovacic	106
7	Josip Simunic	105
=	Domagoj Vida	105
9	Ivica Olic	104
10	Vedran Corluka	103
11	Dario Simic	100

DEER DARIJO

Darijo Srna is Croatia's seventh top scorer of all time, despite playing many games as a right-back or wing-back. He has a tattoo on his calf in the shape of a deer, the Croatian word for which is "srna". He also has a tattoo on his chest – the name of his brother Igor, who has Down's syndrome and to whom he dedicates each goal he scores. Srna was one of three players to reach 100 appearances for their country against South Korea in February 2013. The other two were Stipe Pletikosa and Josip Simunic. When he retired after Euro 2016 he was at the time Croatia's most-capped player.



DOUBLE IDENTITY

Robert Jarni and Robert Prosinecki both have the rare distinction of playing for two different countries at different FIFA World Cup tournaments. They both represented Yugoslavia in Italy in 1990, then newly independent Croatia eight years later in France. Full-back Jarni actually played for both Yugoslavia and Croatia in 1990, then only Yugoslavia in 1991, before switching back – and permanently – to Croat colours in 1992 after the country officially joined UEFA and FIFA. He retired with 81 caps for Croatia, seven for Yugoslavia.

LITTLE HALILOVIC

Foremost among Croatia's crop of young stars is attacking midfielder Alen Halilovic. Born in 1996, he became the youngest scorer in the history of the Croatian first division when he netted for Dinamo Zagreb aged just 16. He made his debut for the national team a few months later, becoming the youngest ever Croatian international in the process. He was snapped up by Barcelona after just two seasons with Dinamo, but was unable to force his way into the team, and joined Hamburg in 2016.

OLE, OLIC

Croatia's second game at the 2014 FIFA World Cup, a 4-0 trouncing of Cameroon, was doubly notable. It was the first time they had scored as many as four goals in a single FIFA World Cup finals match. It also saw striker Ivica Olic become the first player to score for Croatia at two separate FIFA World Cups, having previously found the net in 2002. His lengthy break between finals goals is matched only by Denmark's Michael Laudrup, who scored at the 1986 tournament and then had to wait until the 1998 finals to do so again.

MLAD ALL OVER

Mladen Petric is the only player to score four goals in one game for Croatia – in their 7-0 trouncing of Andorra in October 2006. That equalled Croatia's record victory, having previously beaten Australia by the same scoreline in August 1998. **Davor Suker** scored a hat-trick that day, making him the only Croatian to complete two trebles – his first came in a 7-1 defeat of Estonia in September 1995.



CZECH REPUBLIC

The most successful of the former Eastern Bloc countries, as Czechoslovakia they finished as runners-up in the 1934 and 1962 FIFA World Cups, and shocked West Germany in a penalty shoot-out to win the 1976 UEFA European Championship. Playing as the Czech Republic since 1994, they lost – on a golden goal – in the UEFA Euro 96 final, and in the semi-final eight years later. Recent times have been tougher, and although one of Europe's stronger nations, the Czechs failed to qualify for the 2010 or 2014 FIFA World Cups, but were UEFA Euro 2012 and 2020 quarter-finalists.



EURO-VER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN

Vladimir Smicer scored at three consecutive UEFA European Championships, finding the net in 1996 (against Russia in a thrilling 3-3 draw), 2000 (scoring twice in a 2-0 win over Denmark) and 2004 (in a 3-2 victory over the Dutch that has gone down as a classic encounter). Perhaps his other greatest achievement came in his final game for English club Liverpool, during which he scored as a second-half substitute as his team came back from 3-0 down to beat AC Milan in the 2005 UEFA Champions League final. Smicer's wife, Pavlina, is the daughter of former Czechoslovakia striker Ladislav Vizek, who won footballing gold with his country at the 1980 summer Olympics but was then sent off against France at the FIFA World Cup two years later.

CHIP WITH EVERYTHING

One of the most famous penalties ever taken was Antonin Panenka's decisive spot-kick for Czechoslovakia against West Germany in the final of the 1976 UEFA European Championship, giving the Czechs victory in the shoot-out. Despite the tension, and the responsibility resting on him, Panenka cheekily chipped the ball into the middle of the goal – as goalkeeper Sepp Maier dived to the side. That style of spot-kick is now widely known as a "Panenka", and has been replicated by the likes of France's Zinedine Zidane, in the 2006 FIFA World Cup final.



POPULAR KAREL

UEFA Euro 96 gave **Karel Poborsky** the perfect platform to take his career to new heights as he helped the Czech Republic reach the final and then sealed a dream move to Manchester United. His lob against Portugal in the quarter-finals was rated as one of the finest opportunist goals in the tournament's history.

CECH CAP

Goalkeeper **Petr Cech** has worn a protective cap while playing ever since suffering a fractured skull during an English Premier League match in October 2006. He later added a chin protector after requiring a facial operation following a training accident. Cech was born as a triplet, along with sister Sarka and brother Michal, who sadly died of an infection at the age of two. Cech served notice of his talents when he was beaten by only one penalty in a shoot-out against France to decide the 2002 UEFA U-21 European Championship final, helping the Czechs to win the trophy. He has also earned winners' medals as Chelsea collected the 2012 UEFA Champions League (he was named man of the match in the penalty shoot-out win over Bayern) and 2013 UEFA Europa League. He celebrated his 100th appearance for the Czech Republic with a clean sheet in a 3-0 March 2013 victory over Armenia, and retired as his country's most-capped player after Euro 2016.



PASSING THE PUC

The final of the 1934 FIFA World Cup was the first to go into extra-time, with Czechoslovakia ultimately losing 2-1 to hosts Italy despite taking a 76th-minute lead through Antonin Puc. Puc was Czechoslovakia/ the Czech Republic's top international scorer when he retired in 1938 until he was passed, first by Jan Koller, 67 years later, and, latterly, by Milan Baros.

WALK-OUT

Belgium's 1920 victory in the Olympic Games was overshadowed when Czechoslovakia walked off the pitch after half an hour in protest following what they saw as biased refereeing. Czechoslovakia are the only team in the history of Olympic football to have been disqualified.

SPEED DEMON

Milan Baros, second to Jan Koller in the Czech Republic's all-time goalscoring list, is the only Czech to win the Golden Boot at a FIFA World Cup or a UEFA European Championship. He won the prize after scoring five goals at Euro 2004 in Portugal – when the Czechs lost to eventual winners Greece in the semi-final. Baros helped his country win the 2002 UEFA European U-21 Championship in Switzerland. Three team-mates in the final went on to play in full internationals: Petr Cech, Martin Jiranek and Zdenek Grygera. Baros set a less impressive landmark in November 2007, when his Ferrari was caught travelling at 271 km/h between Lyon and Geneva – the fastest speed ever recorded in France's Ain region. Baros was, inevitably, given a driving ban. He retired from international football in 2012, aged 30, after playing in his third Euro finals.





THE CANNON COLLECTS

Pavel Nedved's election as European Footballer of the Year in 2003 ended an impatient wait for fans in the Czech Republic who had seen a string of outstanding players overlooked since Josef Masopust had been honoured back in 1962. Masopust, a midfield general, had scored the opening goal in the FIFA World Cup final that year before Brazil hit back to win 3-1 in the Chilean capital of Santiago. Years later, Masopust was remembered by Pele and nominated as one of his 125 greatest living footballers. At club level, Masopust won eight Czechoslovak league titles with Dukla Prague, the army club. He was also the winner, in 1962, of the first Czech Golden Ball as domestic footballer of the year. It was another day and in another age. Masopust was presented with his award before the kick-off of a European Cup quarter-final with Benfica – with a minimum of fuss. Years later, Masopust said: "Eusebio just shook hands with me, I put the trophy in my sports bag and went home on the tram."

TOP SCORERS

1	Jan Koller	55
2	Milan Baros	41
3	Vladimir Smicer	27
4	Tomas Rosicky	23
5	Pavel Kuka	22
6	Patrik Schick	20
7	Patrik Berger	18
=	Pavel Nedved	18
9	Vratislav Lokvenc	14
=	Tomas Soucek	14



TOP CAPS

1	Petr Cech	124
2	Karel Poborsky	118
3	Tomas Rosicky	105
4	Jaroslav Plasil	103
5	Milan Baros	93
6	Jan Koller	91
=	Pavel Nedved	91
8	Vladimir Smicer	81
9	Tomas Ujfalusi	78
=	Marek Jankulovski	78

TEN OUT OF TEN

Giant striker **Jan Koller** is Czech football's all-time leading marksman with 55 goals in 91 appearances. Koller scored on his senior debut against Belgium and struck ten goals in ten successive internationals. He scored six goals in each of the 2000, 2004 and 2008 UEFA European Championship qualifying campaigns. He began his career with Sparta Prague, who converted him from goalkeeper to goalscorer. Then, in Belgium, he was top scorer with Lokeren, before scoring 42 goals in two league title-winning campaigns with Anderlecht. Later, with Borussia Dortmund in Germany, he once went in goal after Jens Lehmann had been sent off and kept a clean sheet – having scored in the first half.

DENMARK

Denmark have been playing international football since 1908, but it was not until the mid-1980s that they became competitive at the game's major tournaments. The country's crowning moment came in 1992 when, after being called up as a replacement just ten days before the start of the tournament, they walked away with the UEFA European Championship crown, shocking defending world champions West Germany 2-0 in the final. They may not have been able to repeat that success, but they did recover from the collapse of Christian Eriksen to reach the semis of Euro 2020.



LEADERSHIP STYLE

Morten Olsen captained Denmark at the 1986 FIFA World Cup and later became the first Dane to reach a century of caps, eventually stepping down from the national team with four goals in 102 international appearances between 1970 and 1989. After he retired from playing all football that year, he switched to coaching, first at club level with Brondby, FC Koln and Ajax Amsterdam, before taking on the job as Danish national coach in 2000 and leading them to the 2002 and 2010 FIFA World Cups. Denmark's 2-1 defeat to England in a February 2011 friendly was his 116th international in charge – taking him past the previous record set between 1979 and 1990 by his former national team boss Sepp Piontek. Olsen planned to step down after the 2012 UEFA European Championship, but changed his mind and agreed a new deal extending his stay to the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Olsen's contract was mutually terminated in 2015 in the wake of Denmark's narrow 4-3 aggregate defeat to a Zlatan Ibrahimovic-inspired Sweden in the Euro 2016 qualifying playoffs.



TOP CAPS

	Player	Caps
1	Christian Eriksen	136
2	Simon Kjaer	132
3	Peter Schmeichel	129
4	Dennis Rommedahl	126
5	Jon Dahl Tomasson	112
6	Thomas Helveg	108
7	Kasper Schmeichel	107
8	Michael Laudrup	104
9	Martin Jorgensen	102
=	Morten Olsen	102

GOLDEN GLOVES

Peter Schmeichel was rated as the world's best goalkeeper in the early 1990s, winning many club honours with Manchester United and, famously, the UEFA European Championship with his native Denmark. His son Kasper has earned 107 caps for Denmark to date and helped them to recover from two group-stage defeats to thrash Russia and Wales 4-1 and 4-0 respectively before beating the Czech Republic 2-1 to reach the semi-finals of Euro 2020, where they lost 2-1 to England.

PENALTY REDEMPTION

Former Dundee, Celtic and Brondby midfielder Morten Wieghorst is the only player to be sent off twice while playing for Denmark – yet has also received a special award for fair play. His first international red card came just three minutes after entering the field as a substitute, against South Africa in the 1998 FIFA World Cup. He was again dismissed after coming on as a sub against Italy in the 2000 UEFA European Championship, though this time he managed a whole 28 minutes of action – and scored a goal in Denmark's 3-2 victory. But the other side of his character was shown during a Carlsberg Cup match against Iran in February 2003, when he deliberately missed a penalty. The spot-kick had been awarded after Iranian defender Jalal Kameli Mofrad had picked the ball up, thinking wrongly that a whistle from the crowd was actually the referee blowing for half-time. The International Olympic Committee later presented Wieghorst with a special fair play prize for deliberately striking his penalty wide – a gesture which looked all the more sporting since Denmark went on to lose the game 1-0.

DANISH DYNAMITE

Denmark's 6-1 defeat of Uruguay in the 1986 FIFA World Cup finals first-round group stage in Neza, Mexico, ranks among the country's finest performances. Sadly, Denmark's adventure was ended by Spain in the last 16, losing 5-1 after a poor back pass by Manchester United's Jesper Olsen allowed the Spanish to open the scoring. The Danes were already hampered by the loss of playmaker Frank Arnesen through suspension, after he was sent off during their final group game, a victory over eventual runners-up West Germany. The side – popularly known as "Danish Dynamite" – was captained by future national coach Morten Olsen and managed by Sepp Piontek, a German who became the Danish national team's first professional coach when appointed in 1979. Michael Laudrup, a star member of the classic mid-1980s side, described them as "Europe's answer to Brazil".



CHRISTIAN AID

Nimble playmaker and free-kick specialist **Christian Eriksen** is the latest in a proud tradition of creative young Danish footballers – and another who has enjoyed a popular and successful association with Dutch giants Ajax Amsterdam. He followed the same career path as Danish stars, such as Soren Lerby and Frank Arnesen in the 1970s and 1980s and the Laudrup brothers, Michael and Brian, in the late 1990s. Eriksen helped inspire the Amsterdam club to a hat-trick of title triumphs before crossing the North Sea to join Tottenham Hotspur in the summer of 2013 – and ended his debut season being voted both player of the year and young player of the year by the London club's supporters. His Danish debut came in March 2010, having only turned 18 the previous month. This made him Denmark's fourth youngest debutant – and he was the youngest player at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Eriksen's first international goal was scored in a win against Iceland in April 2011. During Denmark's opening clash with Finland at Euro 2020 Eriksen collapsed having gone into cardiac arrest. Thanks to the quick thinking of both his teammates and medics his life was saved and he went on to make a full recovery.

TOP SCORERS

1	Poul Nielsen	52
=	Jon Dahl Tomasson	52
3	Pauli Jorgensen	44
4	Ole Madsen	42
5	Christian Eriksen	42
6	Preben Elkjaer Larsen	38
7	Michael Laudrup	37
8	Nicklas Bendtner	30
9	Henning Enoksen	29
10	Ebbe Sand	22

QUICK DRAW

Ebbe Sand scored the fastest FIFA World Cup goal ever scored by a substitute, when he netted a mere 16 seconds after coming onto the pitch in Denmark's clash against Nigeria at the 1998 FIFA World Cup.

TAKING THE MICHAEL

One Danish player with unhappy memories of a spell with Ajax Amsterdam is Michael Krohn-Dehli, who made just four appearances for the club between 2006 and 2008. But if he felt any resentment for the Netherlands – and the injuries that hampered his progress there and also contributed to his omission from the 2010 FIFA World Cup – then the 2012 UEFA European Championship brought some redemption. Krohn-Dehli scored the only goal in Denmark's surprise opening victory over the Netherlands. He said afterwards: "It's a little bit special for me as I played for eight years in Holland and I have a Dutch girlfriend, so I think the whole family was cheering in Holland." Manager Morten Olsen admitted afterwards that he should have taken Krohn-Dehli to the FIFA World Cup two years earlier. The only other Dane to score – and twice – at Euro 2012 was Nicklas Bendtner, though he was later fined $100,000 and banned for a game after celebrating his second by displaying underpants bearing the name of a betting firm.

THE UNEXPECTED IN 1992



Few Danish football fans will forget June 1992, their national team's finest hour, when they won the UEFA European Championship, despite not qualifying for the finals in Sweden. Ten days before the tournament opened UEFA asked the Danes – who had finished second to Yugoslavia in their qualifying group – to take Yugoslavia's place, following their exclusion in the wake of international sanctions over the Balkan War. Expectations were minimal, but then the inconceivable happened. Relying heavily on goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel, his defence, and the creative spark of Brian Laudrup, Denmark crafted one of the biggest shocks in modern football history by winning the tournament, culminating in a 2-0 victory over world champions Germany. This victory was all the more remarkable in that Brian's brother Michael, their finest player, quit during the qualifying competition after falling out with coach **Richard Moller Nielsen**. Michael revived his international career in 1993, but Denmark failed to qualify for the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the United States. Among those paying their respects at Moller Nielsen's funeral after his death aged 76 in February 2014 were Schmeichel, Brian Laudrup and Euro 92 team-mates Preben Elkjaer Larsen and John Jensen.

BROTHERS IN ARMS



Brian (left) and Michael Laudrup are among the most successful footballing brothers of modern times. As well as making a combined 186 international appearances, they played across Europe at club level. Michael (104 caps, 37 goals) played in Italy with Lazio and Juventus and in Spain with Barcelona and Real Madrid. Brian (82 caps, 21 goals) starred in Germany with Bayer Uerdingen and Bayern Munich, Italy with Fiorentina and Milan, Scotland for Rangers and England for Chelsea.

GREECE



There is no argument about Greece's proudest footballing moment – their shock triumph at the 2004 UEFA European Championship, one of the game's greatest international upsets. Guided by German coach Otto Rehhagel, it was only the Greeks' second appearance at a UEFA Euro finals. Greece also made the last eight at Euro 2012 in Poland and Ukraine. In the FIFA World Cup, South Africa 2010 marked just their second qualification and they reached the second round of a FIFA World Cup for the first time in 2014.

TOP SCORERS

1	Nikos Anastopoulos	29
2	Angelos Charisteas	25
3	Theofanis Gekas	24
4	Dimitris Saravakos	22
5	Mimis Papaioannou	21
6	Nikos Machlas	18
7	Demis Nikolaidis	17
=	Konstantinos Mitroglou	17
9	Panagiotis Tsalouchidis	16
10	Giorgos Sideris	14

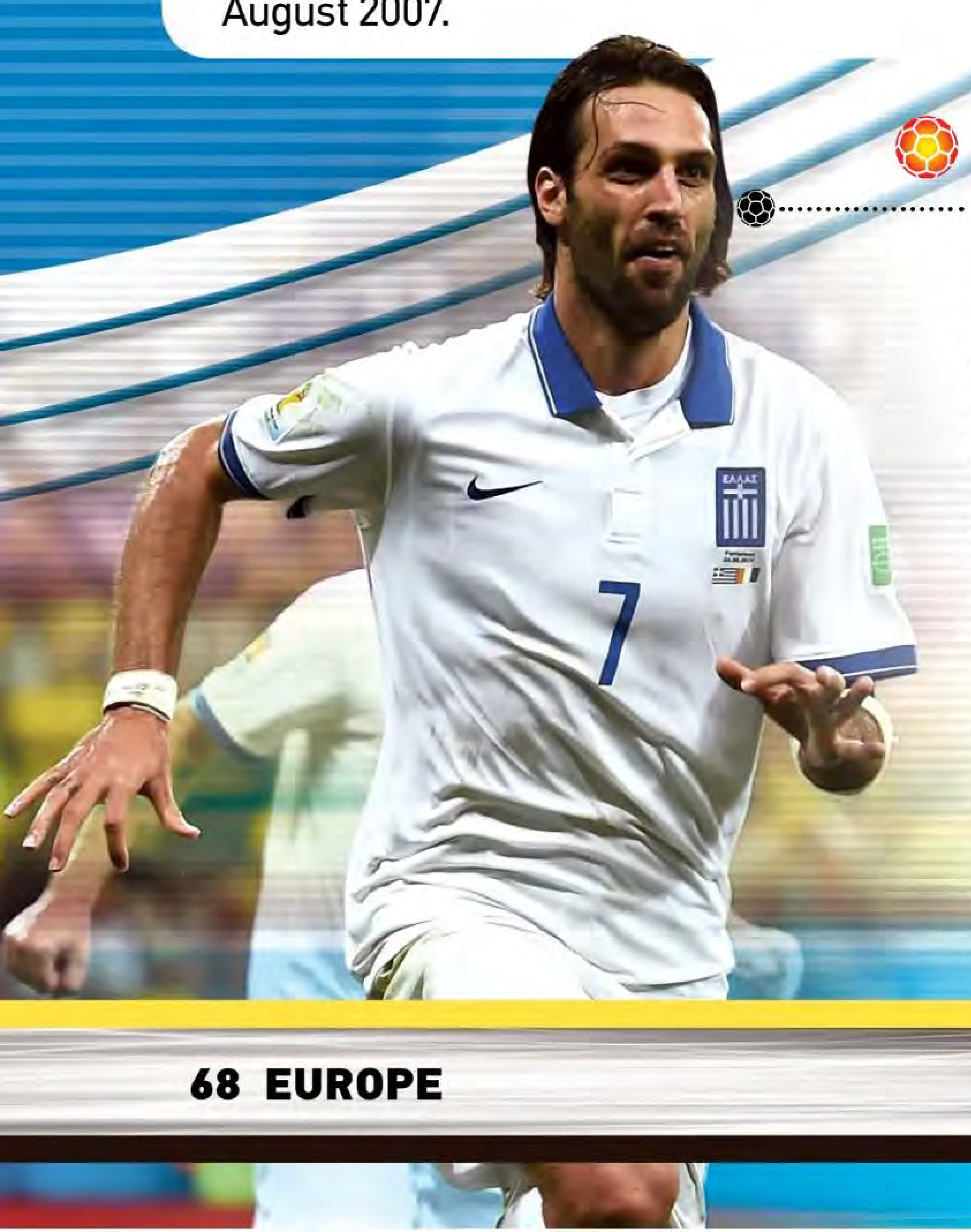
SIMPLY THEO BEST

Theodoros 'Theo' Zagorakis – born near Kavala on 27 October 1971 – was captain of Greece when they won the UEFA European Championship in 2004 and the defensive midfielder was also given the prize for the tournament's best player. He is the second most-capped Greek footballer of all time, with 120 caps. But it was not until his 101st international appearance – 10 years and five months after his Greek debut – that he scored his first goal for his country, in a FIFA World Cup qualifier against Denmark in February 2005. He retired from international football after making a 15-minute cameo appearance against Spain in August 2007.



PARTY CRASHERS

Shock UEFA Euro 2004 winners Greece became the first team to beat both the holders and the hosts on the way to winning either a UEFA European Championship or FIFA World Cup. In fact, they beat hosts Portugal twice – in both the tournament's opening game and the final, with a quarter-final victory over defending champions France in between.



GORGEOUS GEORGE

Georgios Samaras won and converted the last-minute penalty that sent Greece through to the knock-out stages of a FIFA World Cup for the first time, clinching a dramatic 2-1 victory over Group C opponents Ivory Coast at the 2014 tournament in Brazil. The goal, following a foul by Giovanni Sio, was former Celtic striker Samaras's ninth goal for his country – his first coming on his debut against Belarus in February 2006. Samaras could actually have played international football for Australia, because his father, Ioannis, was born in Melbourne and moved to Greece aged 13. Ioannis actually won 16 caps for Greece between 1986 and 1990, but he is a long way behind his son, who has made more than 80 appearances.

ALL WHITE NOW

The surprise triumph at UEFA Euro 2004 brought a major change to Greek international football – they switched the national team's kit from blue to white. The former colours had been used since the Hellenic Football Federation was formed in 1926, but the success of Otto Rehhagel's men in their second kit prompted the permanent change of colours.

TOP CAPS

1	Giorgos Karagounis	139
2	Theodoros Zagorakis	120
3	Kostas Katsouranis	116
4	Vasilis Torosidis	101
5	Angelos Basinas	100
6	Stratos Apostolakis	96
7	Antonis Nikopolidis	90
=	Sokratis Papastathopoulos	90
9	Angelos Charisteas	88
10	Dimitris Salpingidis	82



DIMI MORE

Striker **Dimitrios Salpingidis** not only struck the only goal of Greece's 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifying play-off victory against Ukraine, sealing their place in South Africa, he also then became the first Greek ever to score at a FIFA World Cup, with a 44th-minute deflected strike in the 2-1 Group B triumph over Nigeria. Yet another notable achievement was added with his equalizer against Poland in the opening game of UEFA Euro 2012: this made him the first Greek ever to score at a FIFA World Cup and a UEFA European Championship.

GEKAS SETBACK

With only two goals, Greece were the lowest scoring team to reach the second round at the 2014 FIFA World Cup. They then faced their first tournament penalty shoot-out, in the round-of-16, and lost to Costa Rica, 5-3 after a 1-1 draw. The only miss was by Theofanis Gekas, who at 34 years and 37 days, was the second-oldest man to miss in a FIFA World Cup shoot-out. Italy captain Franco Baresi was 33 days older when he missed in the 1994 FIFA World Cup final against Brazil.

HONESTY PAYS

Greece's 500th goal in international football was scored by Demis Nikolaidis at Manchester's Old Trafford in October 2001, giving them an unexpected 2–1 lead away to England in a final 2002 FIFA World Cup qualifier – although David Beckham would go on to equalize with a famous last-minute free-kick. In March the following year, striker Nikolaidis was formally acclaimed by the International Committee for Fair Play for admitting to the referee that he handled the ball when scoring for AEK Athens in the final of the Greek Cup. His team still won the match, and the trophy.

TOP KAT

Greek football has enjoyed many Portuguese links. Former national coach Fernando Santos is Portuguese and took over in 2010 after being the Greek league's most successful manager in the 2000s. He was also boss of Portuguese giants Benfica, and their signings this century have included big Greek stars **Kostas Katsouranis** and Giorgios Karagounis. Both players were part of the Greek side that lifted the 2004 UEFA European Championship trophy at Benfica's Estadio da Luz in Lisbon. Katsouranis also played at UEFA Euro 2012, but squandered his best chance of a first goal in a finals tournament when he missed a penalty in the opening game against Poland.





GRIEF AND GLORY FOR GIORGOS

It was a bittersweet day for captain **Giorgos Karagounis** when he equalled the Greek record for international appearances, with his 120th cap against Russia in their final Group A game at the UEFA Euro 2012. The midfielder scored the only goal of the game, giving Greece a place in the quarter-finals at Russia's expense – but a second yellow card of the tournament ruled him out of the next match, in which the Greeks lost to Germany. Karagounis was one of three survivors from Greece's Euro 2004 success, along with fellow midfielder Kostas Katsouranis and goalkeeper Kostas Chalkias – though it was only in Poland that Chalkias made the first of his UEFA European Championship appearances, having been understudy in 2004 and 2008. Manager Fernando Santos also surprised many by leaving the winning goalscoring hero of Euro 2004, Angelos Charisteas, out of the squad. Chalkias, at 38 Euro 2012's oldest player, announced his international retirement once the tournament ended.

KING OTTO

German coach Otto Rehhagel became the first foreigner to be voted "Greek of the Year" in 2004, after leading the country to glory at that year's UEFA European Championship. He was also offered honorary Greek citizenship. His nine years in charge, after being appointed in 2001, made him Greece's longest-serving international manager. The UEFA Euro 2004 triumph was the first time a country coached by a foreigner had triumphed at either the UEFA European Championship or FIFA World Cup. Rehhagel was aged 65 at UEFA Euro 2004, making him the oldest coach to win the UEFA European Championship – though that record was taken off him four years later, when 69-year-old Luis Aragones lifted the trophy with Spain.

HUNGARY

For a period in the early 1950s, Hungary possessed the most talented football team on the planet. They claimed Olympic gold at Helsinki in 1952, inflicted a crushing first-ever Wembley defeat on England the following year, and entered the 1954 FIFA World Cup unbeaten in almost four years and as firm favourites to win the crown. They lost to West Germany in the final, and Hungary's footballing fortunes on the world stage have never been quite the same again, although they acquitted themselves well at EURO 2020 and managed to reach the knockouts of EURO 2024.





RETURN TO SANDOR

Sandor Egervari was assistant coach the last time Hungary played at a FIFA World Cup finals, in 1986, and was in charge for one of the success-starved country's most encouraging footballing moments in recent years: third place at the 2009 FIFA U-20 World Cup. Then-Liverpool striker Krisztian Nemeth scored the decisive spot-kick in a play-off defeat of Costa Rica, with only champions Ghana and runners-up Brazil performing better. His reward was promotion to manage the full national team in summer 2010, but he resigned following a national record 8-1 loss to the Netherlands in October 2013 and was succeeded by former international Attila Pinter. Hungary's only comparable defeats were 7-0 trouncings by England in 1908, England Amateurs in 1912 and Germany in 1941.

GERA'S SHARE OF THE SPOILS

While none could compare with Ferenc Puskas, the elegant left-footed playmaker **Zoltan Gera** has been one of Hungary's most noted footballers of recent decades – not only with his performances in the English Premier League (with Fulham and West Bromwich Albion), but also on the international stage. His tally of 97 caps could have been higher but for a brief international retirement in 2009 after a dispute with then-manager Erwin Koeman after Gera arrived late for a team meeting. He returned to the fold when Sandor Egervari took over the following year and was made captain. His great volley against Portugal at Euro 2016 made him the second-oldest scorer in the tournament's history at 37 years and 62 days. It was later voted goal of the tournament by fans.

TOP SCORERS

1	Ferenc Puskas	84
2	Sandor Kocsis	75
3	Imre Schlosser	59
4	Lajos Tichy	51
5	Gyorgy Sarosi	42
6	Nandor Hidegkuti	39
7	Ferenc Bene	36
8	Gyula Zsengeller	32
=	Tibor Nyilasi	32
10	Florian Albert	31



GOLDEN HEAD

Sandor Kocsis, top scorer in the 1954 FIFA World Cup finals with 11 goals, was so good in the air he was known as "The Man with the Golden Head". In 68 internationals he scored an incredible 75 goals, including a record seven hat-tricks. His tally included two decisive extra-time goals in the 1954 FIFA World Cup semi-final against Uruguay, when Hungary had appeared to be on the brink of defeat.



GALLOPING MAJOR

Ferenc Puskas was one of the greatest footballers of all time, scoring a remarkable 84 goals in 85 international matches for Hungary and 514 goals in 529 matches in the Hungarian and Spanish leagues. Possessing the most lethal left-foot shot in the history of football, he was known as the "Galloping Major" – by virtue of his playing for the army team Honved before joining Real Madrid and going on to play for Spain. During the 1950s he was top scorer and captain of the legendary "Mighty Magyars" (the nickname given to the Hungarian national team), as well as of the army club Honved.



HUNGARY FOR IT

Hungary's 6-3 win over England at Wembley in 1953 remains one of the most significant international results of all time. Hungary became the first team from outside the British Isles to beat England at home, a record that had stood since 1901. The Hungarians had been undefeated for three years and had won the Olympic tournament the year before, while England were the so-called "inventors" of football. The British press dubbed it "The Match of the Century". In the event, the match revolutionized the game in England, Hungary's unequivocal victory exposing the naivete of English football tactics. England captain Billy Wright later summed up the humiliation by saying: "We completely underestimated the advances that Hungary had made, and not only tactically. When we walked out at Wembley ... I looked down and noticed that the Hungarians had on these strange, lightweight boots, cut away like slippers under the ankle bone. I turned to big Stan Mortensen and said: 'We should be all right here, Stan, they haven't got the proper kit.'"

EUROPEAN PIONEERS

While Argentina's match against Uruguay in July 1902 was the first international outside the British Isles, Hungary's 5-0 defeat to Austria in Vienna three months later was the first in Europe between two non-UK sides. Ten of Hungary's first 16 internationals were against Austria, with the Hungarians winning four, drawing one and losing five of them. In total, Hungary have won 66, drawn 30 and lost 40 against their Austrian neighbours.

GLORIOUS FAILURE

Hungary were runaway favourites to win the 1954 FIFA World Cup in Switzerland. They arrived for the finals having been unbeaten for four years. In the first round they thrashed West Germany 8-3, despite finishing with ten men after skipper Ferenc Puskas injured an ankle.

GOODISON LESSON

In the 1966 FIFA World Cup, Hungary gave Brazil a footballing lesson at Goodison Park, running out 3-1 winners before their progress was stopped by the Soviet Union in the quarter-finals. It was Brazil's first defeat in the FIFA World Cup since the 1954 quarter-finals, when they had lost 4-2 to ... Hungary.

YEARS OF PLENTY

Hungary's dazzling line-up of the early 1950s was known as the "*Aranycsapat*" – or "Golden Team". They set a record for international matches unbeaten, going 31 consecutive games without defeat between May 1950 and their July 1954 FIFA World Cup final loss to West Germany – a run that included clinching Olympic gold at Helsinki in Finland in 1952. That 31-match tally has been overtaken since only by Brazil and Spain. Hungary in the 1950s also set a record for most consecutive games scoring at least one goal – 73 matches – while their average of 5.4 goals per game at the 1954 FIFA World Cup remains an all-time high for the tournament.

NERVES AND STEEL

Gabor Kiraly may now have won more caps, and earned more attention for his customary tracksuit bottoms – often compared to pyjama trousers – but **Gyula Grosics** is still recognized as Hungary's greatest goalkeeper. Unusual for a goalkeeper of his era, he was comfortable with the ball at his feet and was willing to rush out of his area. The on-field confidence was not always displayed off it, however – and he was thought to be a nervous character, a hypochondriac and a loner. He allegedly asked to be substituted before the end at Wembley in 1953. He suffered after Hungary's surprise loss to West Germany in the 1954 FIFA World Cup final, being blamed for the equalizer.



TOP CAPS

1	Balazs Dzsudzsak	109
2	Gabor Kiraly	108
3	Jozsef Bozsik	101
4	Zoltan Gera	97
5	Roland Juhasz	95
6	Laszlo Fazekas	92
7	Gyula Grosics	86
=	Adam Szalai	86
9	Adam Nagy	85
=	Ferenc Puskas	85

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland have played as a separate country since 1921 (before that there had been an all-Ireland side). They have qualified for the FIFA World Cup finals on three occasions: in 1958 (when they became the smallest country to reach the quarter-final stage), 1982 and 1986. The team qualified for its first UEFA European Championship in 2016, reaching the second round.





GEORGE BEST

One of the greatest players never to grace a FIFA World Cup, **George Best** (capped 37 times by Northern Ireland) nevertheless won domestic and European honours with Manchester United – including both a European Champions Cup medal and the European Footballer of the Year award in 1968. He also played in the United States, Hong Kong and Australia before his "final" retirement in 1984.

GIANT JENNINGS

Pat Jennings's 119 appearances for Northern Ireland also stood as an international record at one stage. The former Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal goalkeeper made his international debut, aged just 18, against Wales on 15 April 1964, and played his final game in the 1986 FIFA World Cup, against Brazil, on his 41st birthday.

'PETER THE GREAT'

Former Manchester City and Derby County striker Peter Doherty, one of the most expensive players of his era, won the English league and FA Cup as a player, and earned 19 caps for Northern Ireland in a career interrupted by World War Two. His late goal to earn a 2-2 draw in 1947 ensured Northern Ireland avoided defeat against England for the first time. As manager, he led Northern Ireland to the quarter-finals of the 1958 FIFA World Cup – Northern Ireland remain the smallest country ever to reach that stage of the competition. They were defeated 4-0 by France, who went on to finish third.



OH DANNY BOY

Northern Ireland's captain at the 1958 FIFA World Cup was Tottenham Hotspur's cerebral **Danny Blanchflower** – the first twentieth-century captain of an English club to win both the league and FA Cup in the same season, in 1960–61. When asked the secret of his national team's success in 1958, he offered the explanation: "Our tactic is to equalize before the others have scored." More famously, he offered the philosophy: "The great fallacy is that the game is first and foremost about winning. It's nothing of the kind. The game is about glory. It's about doing things in style, with a flourish, about going out and beating the other lot, not waiting for them to die of boredom."

TOP SCORERS

1	David Healy	36
2	Kyle Lafferty	20
3	Colin Clarke	13
=	Billy Gillespie	13
=	Steven Davis	13
6	Gerry Armstrong	12
=	Joe Bambrick	12
=	Iain Dowie	12
=	Jimmy Quinn	12
10	Olphie Stanfield	11
=	Josh Magennis	11
12	Johnny Crossan	10
=	Jimmy McIlroy	10
=	Peter McParland	10

THE BOY DAVIS

Midfielder **Steven Davis** became Northern Ireland's youngest post-war captain when he led out the side against Uruguay in May 2006, aged just 21 years, five months and 20 days. He has remained captain under current coach Ian Baraclough, who replaced previous coach Michael O'Neill in June 2020. Davis earned his record 120th cap against Bosnia and Herzegovina in a one-legged Euro 2020 playoff on 8 October 2020.



TOP CAPS

1	Steven Davis	140
2	Pat Jennings	119
3	Aaron Hughes	112
4	Jonny Evans	107
5	David Healy	95
6	Mal Donaghy	91
7	Kyle Lafferty	89
8	Sammy McIlroy	88
=	Maik Taylor	88
10	Keith Gillespie	86

'PETER THE LATE'

Peter Watson is thought to have had the shortest Northern Ireland international career, spending two minutes on the pitch in a 5-0 UEFA European Championship qualifying win over Cyprus in April 1971. Coventry-born Watson was playing that season for Northern Irish club Distillery, in a side featuring law student and future international **Martin O'Neill** – who would go on to win 64 caps, including captaining his country at the 1982 FIFA World Cup.



HOSTILE HOSTS

Northern Ireland topped their first-round group at the 1982 FIFA World Cup, thanks to a 1-0 win over hosts Spain at a passionate Mestalla Stadium in Valencia. Watford striker Gerry Armstrong scored the goal and the Irish held on despite defender Mal Donaghy being sent off. A 4-1 second-round loss to France denied Northern Ireland a semi-finals place. Armstrong moved to Spain, joining Mallorca the following year and, predictably, was regularly booed by rival fans.

KEEPING CONNECTED

Maik Taylor is Northern Ireland's joint-eighth most-capped player, though he has no family connection to the country. Born in Germany, to an English father and German mother, his British passport meant he could represent any of the Home Nations – and he chose Northern Ireland. The goalkeeper was skipper for his 88th and final appearance, against Italy, in October 2011.

YOUNG GUN

Norman Whiteside became the then-youngest player at a FIFA World Cup finals (beating Pele's record) when he represented Northern Ireland in Spain in 1982 aged 17 years and 41 days. He won 38 caps, scoring nine goals, before injury forced his retirement aged just 26.



STRIFE OF BRIAN

Brian McLean's Northern Ireland career began and ended with a second-half appearance against Estonia in March 2006. The Scottish-born player had been thought eligible to play for Northern Ireland through family links, but he had played for Scotland Under-17s in a UEFA competition four years earlier and not officially changed his allegiance until after the official deadline of his 21st birthday.

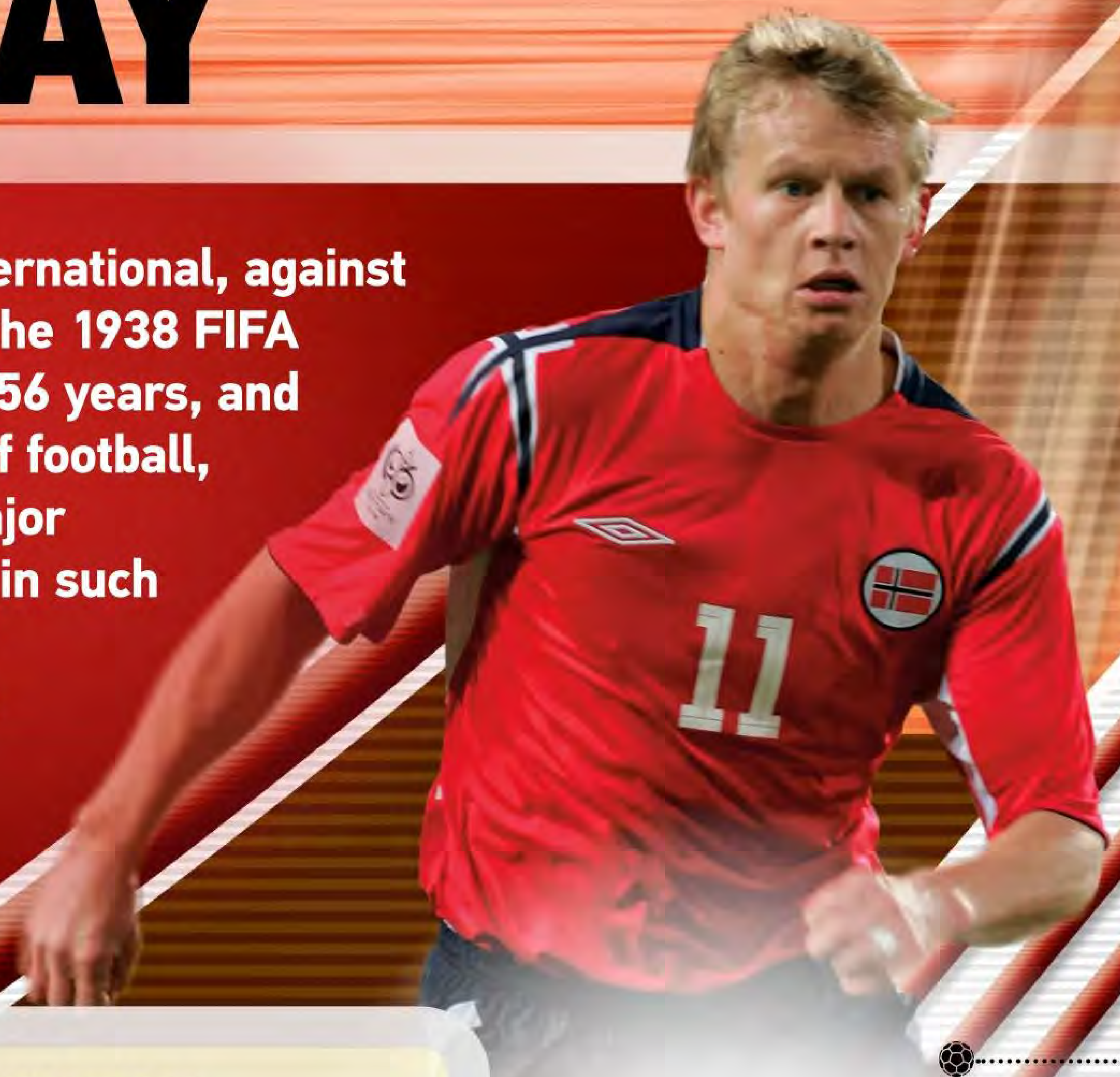
HERO HEALY

Northern Ireland's record goalscorer **David Healy** has scored almost double as many international goals as the next highest player on the list. He scored twice on his debut against Luxembourg on 23 February 2000, and all three as Northern Ireland stunned Spain 3-2 in a qualifier for UEFA Euro 2008 on 6 September 2006. He also hit the winner against Sven-Goran Eriksson's England in September 2005, Northern Ireland's first victory over them since 1972. Healy would later endure a four-year, 24-game scoring drought between October 2008 and November 2012. His final goal for his country came in a 2-1 home defeat to Israel in March 2013. He retired from all football later that year, aged 34.



NORWAY

Although they played their first international, against Sweden, in 1908 and qualified for the 1938 FIFA World Cup, it would take a further 56 years, and the introduction of a direct brand of football, before Norway reappeared at a major international tournament. Success in such competitions has been rare – they have never progressed beyond the second round – but Norway retains the distinction of being the only nation in history never to have lost to Brazil.





JUVE DONE IT ALL

Jorgen Juve netted his national record 33 international goals in 45 appearances between 1928 and 1937. He did not score as Norway claimed bronze at the Berlin 1936 Olympics, but was playing when Norway beat Germany 2-0 in the quarter-finals, prompting spectators Adolf Hitler and other Nazi leaders to storm out in fury. After retiring in 1938, he worked as a legal scholar, sports journalist and author of books about the Olympics and football.

GOALS FOR EITHER IVERSEN

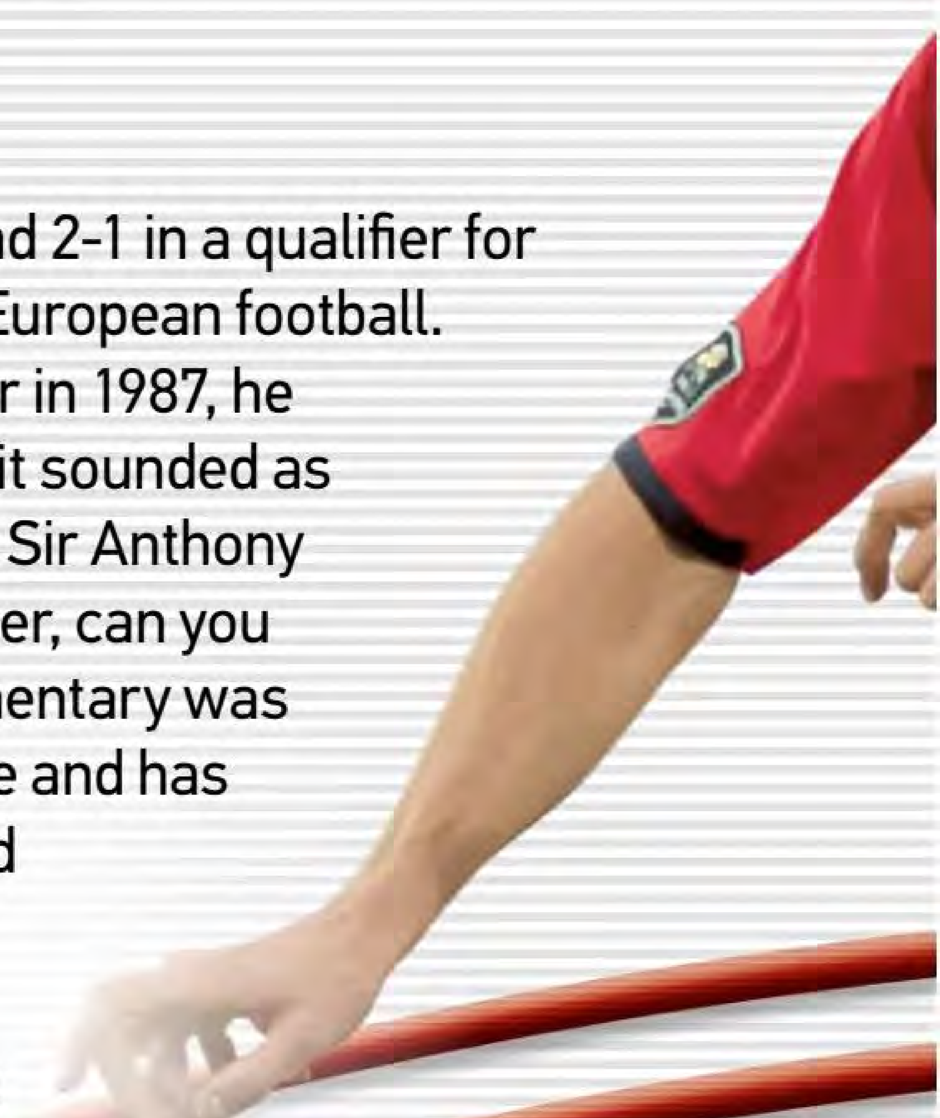
Steffen Iversen scored the only goal of Norway's only win at a UEFA European Championship – against Spain at the 2000 tournament. Iversen's father Odd had previously been one of the country's leading strikers, hitting memorable strikes in unexpected victories over Yugoslavia in a 1966 FIFA World Cup qualifier and away to France ahead of the 1970 tournament. Odd scored a total of 19 times in 45 games for Norway between 1967 and 1979. Steffen equalled his father's international scoring tally with a hat-trick against Malta in November 2007 – then scored his next two goals against Iceland the following September. He was still playing for Norway in 2011, aged 34, having reached 79 caps and scoring 21 goals.

TOP SCORERS

1	Jorgen Juve	33
2	Erling Haaland	32
3	Einar Gundersen	26
4	Harald Hennum	25
5	John Carew	24
6	Tore Andre Flo	23
=	Ole Gunnar Solskjaer	23
8	Gunnar Thoresen	22
9	Steffen Iversen	21
10	Jan Age Fjortoft	20
=	Joshua King	20
12	Oyvind Leonhardsen	19

YOUR BOYS TOOK A HELL OF A BEATING

Bjorge Lillelien's famous commentary after Norway beat England 2-1 in a qualifier for the 1982 FIFA World Cup remains one of the iconic moments of European football. A commentator from 1957 until just before his death from cancer in 1987, he concentrated on winter sports and football. Roughly translated, it sounded as follows: "Lord Nelson, Lord Beaverbrook, Sir Winston Churchill, Sir Anthony Eden, Clement Attlee, Henry Cooper, Lady Diana, Maggie Thatcher, can you hear me? Your boys took a hell of a beating." Although the commentary was for Norwegian radio, it soon made its way to an English audience and has achieved cliché status. In 2002, Lillelien's words were designated the greatest piece of sports commentary ever by the *Observer* newspaper's sports supplement. Such is its place in British sporting culture, parodies of the commentary have been written to celebrate a vast array of domestic sporting victories.



LONG-DISTANCE RIISE

Fierce-shooting, ex-Liverpool, AS Monaco and AS Roma left-back Jon Arne Riise marked the game in which he matched Thorbjorn Svenssen's Norwegian appearances record, against Greece in August 2012, by getting onto the scoresheet, albeit in a 3-2 losing cause. He was also on the losing side when claiming the record for himself, a 2-0 loss in Iceland the following month, before scoring his 16th international goal in his 106th match four days later as Norway beat Slovenia 2-1. Midfielder Bjorn Helge Riise, Jon Arne's younger brother, joined him at English club Fulham, and has made more than 30 full international appearances.

BOOT CAMPER

Egil Olsen, one of Europe's most eccentric coaches, was signed up for a surprise second spell as national manager when Norway put their faith in the direct-football specialist trying to qualify for the 2010 FIFA World Cup – 15 years after he had led the unfancied Scandinavians to the 1994 finals. That had been Norway's first finals appearance since 1938 and they followed it up by beating Brazil in the first round in France in 1998, making a hero out of the man in Wellington boots who guided his country to No. 2 in FIFA's official rankings. Before answering his country's call for a second stint as manager, Olsen's last job had been as manager of Iraq, but he left after only three months in charge. Remarkably, in his first match back at the helm for Norway, he masterminded a 1-0 win away to Germany with his route-one tactics.

ERIK THE VIKING

Goalkeeper Erik Thorstvedt played at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles when Norway replaced the boycotting Poland and East Germany. He was also a key member of the team that qualified for the 1994 FIFA World Cup and played a Norwegian goalkeeping record of 97 internationals between 1982 and 1996.

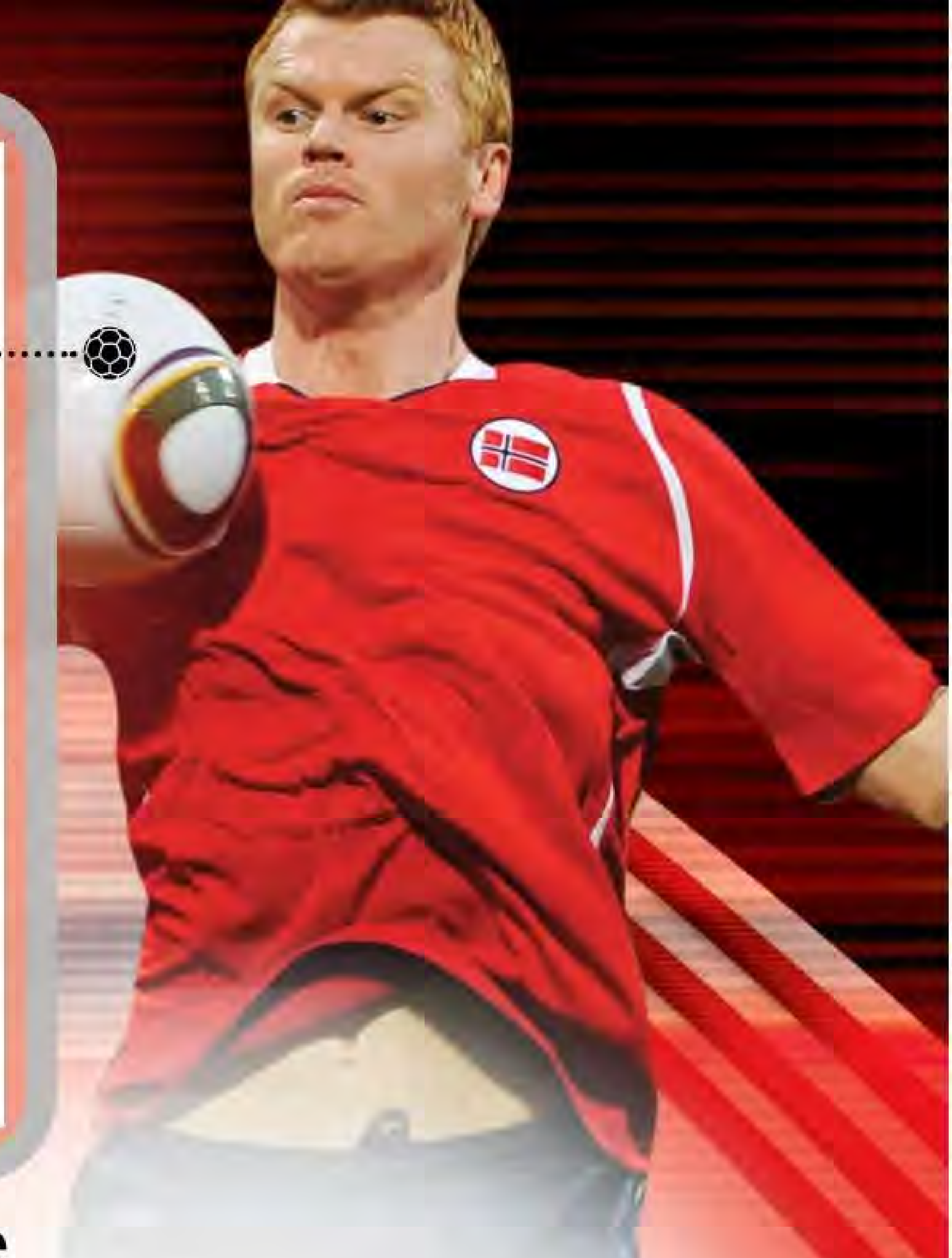


GOAL HANGE

Norway's joint-fifth most-capped player is commanding centre-back **Brede Hangeland**, who retired in 2014. He was actually born 5,000 miles from Norway in Houston, Texas, where his father worked for two years for an oil firm, but spent most of his childhood in Stavanger, Norway, making his name with local side Viking and then Danish club Copenhagen. His former Viking manager Roy Hodgson signed him in 2008 for English Premier League team Fulham, where Hangeland became a fans' favourite. He made his international debut in November 2002, but did not score his first goal until his 62nd appearance, against Iceland in September 2010. Another wait followed before his second, third and fourth came in quick succession between August 2012 and October 2012.

TOP CAPS

1	**John Arne Riise**	**110**
2	**Thorbjorn Svenssen**	**104**
3	**Henning Berg**	**100**
4	**Erik Thorstvedt**	**97**
5	**John Carew**	**91**
=	**Brede Hangeland**	**91**
7	**Oyvind Leonhardsen**	**86**
8	**Kjetil Rekdal**	**83**
=	**Morten Gamst Pedersen**	**83**
10	**Steffen Iversen**	**79**



LONG STAY TRAVELLERS

Norway's best finish at an international tournament was the bronze medal they clinched at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, having lost to Italy in the semi-finals but beaten Poland 3-2 in a medal play-off thanks to an Arne Brustad hat-trick. That year's side has gone down in Norwegian football history as the "*Bronselaget*", or "Bronze Team". However, they had entered the tournament with low expectations and were forced to alter their travel plans ahead of the semi-final against Italy on 10 August – Norwegian football authorities had originally booked their trip home for the previous day, not expecting their team to get so far. Italy beat Norway 2-1 in extra-time not only in that summer's Olympic semi-final, but also in the first round of the FIFA World Cup two years later – going on to win both tournaments.

GOLD TIMERS

Any Norway international who reaches 25 appearances for the country is traditionally awarded a gold watch by Norway's football association. This custom began with Gunnar Andersen after he reached his quarter-century on 29 June 1919. Andersen, Norway's football captain at the 1920 Summer Olympics in Antwerp, was also an accomplished ski-jumper.

THE WHOLE HOGMO

Per-Mathias Hogmo, appointed manager of Norway's men's national team in September 2013, also spent three years in charge of Norway's women's team. He coached the women's side 1997-2000, taking them to a fourth-place finish at the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup and to gold medal glory at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Hogmo then became coach of Norway's men's U-21 side before returning to club football with Tromso. He succeeded Egil Olsen as Norway coach after the failure to qualify for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Hogmo, who combined coaching with doing a PhD in football at Tromso University, vowed: "I see myself as an innovator and will look to put my stamp on how Norway play." He resigned in 2016 after a poor start to Norway's 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign.



POLAND

The history of Polish football is littered with tremendous highs and depressing lows. Olympic gold-medal success in 1972 and third-place finishes in the 1974 and 1982 FIFA World Cup competitions were followed by failure to qualify for any tournament until 1992. Poland made it to the UEFA European Championship for the first time in 2008 and co-hosted the tournament with Ukraine in 2012. They have since qualified for EURO 2016, 2020 and 2024 and both the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.





TOP SCORERS

	Player	Goals
1	Robert Lewandowski	84
2	Wlodzimierz Lubanski	48
3	Grzegorz Lato	45
4	Kazimierz Deyna	41
5	Ernest Pol	39
6	Andrzej Szarmach	32
7	Gerard Cieslik	27
8	Zbigniew Boniek	24
9	Ernest Wilimowski	21
=	Jakub Blaszczykowski	21

STAYING ON LATER THAN LATO

Record-breaking Polish stalwart **Michal Zewlakow** bowed out of international football on familiar turf, even though his country were playing an away game. The versatile defender's 102nd and final appearance for his country was a goalless friendly in Greece in March 2011, at the Karaiskakis stadium in Piraeus where he used to play club football for Olympiacos. Zewlakow had overtaken Grzegorz Lato's appearances record for Poland in his previous match, an October 2010 friendly against Ecuador. He had already helped make footballing history for his homeland when he and brother Marcin, a striker, became the first twins to line up together for Poland, against France in February 2000. Marcin would end his international career with 25 appearances and five goals.

TYTON THE TITAN

Two 1-1 draws in a row at the 2012 UEFA European Championship extended Poland's unbeaten run to eight games and filled the tournament co-hosts with high hopes of reaching the knock-out stages for the first time – only for a 1-0 defeat to the Czech Republic to seal their fate. But among those players to emerge from the tournament with credit was goalkeeper **Przemyslaw Tyton**. The stopper, with only five caps to his name, saved a penalty from Greece's Giorgos Karagounis just moments after coming on in the competition's opening match following a red card for first-choice goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny, and kept his place in the team for the next two games. Szczesny had already conceded an equalizer to Greece's Dimitrios Salpingidis – ending a Polish record run of 512 minutes without allowing opponents to score, stretching back to a 2-1 victory over Hungary in November 2011.



LOVING LEWANDOWSKI

Star striker **Robert Lewandowski** is adept at proving people wrong. He was rejected by Legia Warsaw at the age of 16 and future Poland coach Franciszek Smuda saw nothing in him as a 20 year old, chiding the man who had recommended him, "You owe me petrol money." Lewandowski's prolific form for Lech Poznan secured a big-money move to Germany's Borussia Dortmund in 2009, but he struggled in his first Bundesliga season. However, he soon became one of Europe's top goalscorers, inspiring Dortmund to two Bundesliga titles and the 2013 UEFA Champions League final. He was even warmly applauded by the Dortmund fans when waving goodbye in spring 2014, having agreed a move to rivals Bayern Munich, where he scored 238 times in 253 games. In the summer of 2022 he moved to Barcelona, where to date he has netted 25 goals in just 38 games and won a La Liga title. He has been similarly lethal on the international stage. In 154 games for Poland to date he has scored a remarkable 84 goals, including once at EURO 2012 and EURO 2016, three times at EURO 2020, twice at the 2022 World Cup and again at EURO 2024.

TOP CAPS

1	Robert Lewandowski	154
2	Jakub Blszczykowski	109
3	Kamil Glik	103
4	Michael Zewlakow	102
5	Grzegorz Lato	100
=	Grzegorz Krychowiak	100
7	Kazimierz Deyna	97
8	Jacek Bak	96
=	Jacek Krzynowek	96
10	Piotr Zielinski	95
11	Wladyslaw Zmuda	91

'LITTLE FIGO'



Jacub Blaszczykowski was one of the Polish players to come out of Euro 2012 with the most credit – he scored a spectacular equalising goal against Russia – despite having gone into the tournament in testing circumstances. Before joining the rest of the squad in their training camp, he attended the funeral of his father. His presence at the event was all the more noteworthy because, as a ten-year-old child, Blaszyzkowski had witnessed his mother Anna being stabbed to death by his father, who served a 15-year prison sentence as a result. Polish great Zbigniew Boniek has dubbed Blaszczykowski "Little Figo" – after the Portuguese winger Luis Figo – though he is more commonly known as "Kuba", the name he often wears on the back of his shirt. He had been encouraged to pursue football as a teenager by his uncle Jerzy Brzeczek, who also played for Dortmund and captained Poland, winning 42 caps between 1992 and 1999 and picking up an Olympic silver medal in 1992.

LATO'S MISSION



Grzegorz Lato is not only Poland's second most-capped player, third top-scorer, the only Polish winner of the Golden Boot with his seven goals at the 1974 FIFA World Cup, and a member of the gold medal-winning team at the 1972 Summer Olympics. He was also a leading figure in Poland's co-hosting with Ukraine of the 2012 UEFA European Championship, having become president of the country's football federation in 2008. He vowed: "I am determined to change the image of Polish football, to make it transparent and pure."

FIVE ASIDE

Poland had five different goalscorers when they beat Peru 5-1 at the 1982 FIFA World Cup: Wlodzimierz Smolarek, Grzegorz Lato, Zbigniew Boniek, Andrzej Buncol and Wlodzimierz Ciolek. The feat was not repeated until Phillip Cocu, Marc Overmars, Dennis Bergkamp, Pierre van Hooijdonk and Ronald de Boer gave Holland a 5-0 victory over South Korea at the 1998 FIFA World Cup.

COOL KEEPER

What is it with Polish goalkeepers? The country's outfield players may not always be household names worldwide, but Jerzy Dudek (Liverpool), Artur Boruc and Lukasz Zaluska (both Celtic), Lukasz Fabianski and Wojciech Szczesny (both Arsenal), and Tomasz Kuszczak (Manchester United) have all played roles at four of Britain's most successful clubs.

SUPER ERNEST

Ernest Wilimowski wrote his name into FIFA World Cup history in 1938 when he scored four goals but still finished on the losing side. Poland went down 6-5 after extra-time to Brazil in a first-round tie in Strasbourg, France.

PUNCTUALITY PUNISHMENT

Kazimierz Gorski was the coach – capped once as a player – who led Poland to third place at the 1974 FIFA World Cup, having won gold at the Olympics in Munich, Germany, two years earlier. While winning a reputation for closeness with his players, Gorski could also be ruthless – key player Adam Musial was dropped from the team for a second-round game against Sweden at the 1974 tournament as punishment for turning up 20 minutes late to training. Poland still won the game, 1-0.

BONIEK



Zbigniew Boniek, arguably the best player Poland has ever produced, earned a place among football's legends for his role in the country's progress to third place at the 1982 FIFA World Cup. However, his absence from the tournament's semi-final will go down as one of the great "what ifs" of the competition. Robbed of their star forward through suspension, could Poland have upset both Italy and the odds and reached the final? Instead they lost the match 2-0.

PORTUGAL

Following years of football obscurity, a "golden" generation of players arrived on the scene at the turn of the century, and since then Portugal have become a force on the world stage. Their resurgence culminated in the nation claiming its first major international honour by winning Euro 2016 in France, beating the hosts 1-0 in the final. Portugal then tasted glory again in 2019 by winning the inaugral UEFA Nations League, defeating the Netherlands 1-0 in the final in Porto. Their winning run ended at Euro 2020 with a last-16 1-0 defeat to Belgium. Their 2022 World Cup campaign ended in the quarter-finals at the hands of Morocco.





TOP CAPS

1	Cristiano Ronaldo	214
2	Joao Moutinho	146
3	Pepe	141
4	Luis Figo	127
5	Nani	112
6	Fernando Couto	110
7	Rui Patricio	108
8	Bruno Alves	96
9	Bernardo Silva	95
10	Rui Costa	94



TOP SCORERS

1	Cristiano Ronaldo	132
2	Pauleta	47
3	Eusebio	41
4	Luis Figo	32
5	Nuno Gomes	29
6	Helder Postiga	27
7	Rui Costa	26
8	Bruno Fernandes	24
=	Nani	24
10	Joao Pinto	23
11	Simao	22

THREE AND IN

After suffering a 4-0 trouncing against Germany in their opening game of the 2014 finals – their heaviest FIFA World Cup defeat – Portugal manager Paulo Bento replaced goalkeeper Rui Patricio with Beto for the next match, a 2-2 draw with the USA. Portugal ended their campaign by replacing the injured Beto with Eduardo for the final moments of a 2-1 victory over Ghana. They thus became only the fifth team to use all their goalkeepers in one FIFA World Cup finals and the first since Greece had done so 20 years earlier.

GOODISON GLORY

At the 1966 FIFA World Cup Portugal beat North Korea 5-3 in an incredible quarter-final at Everton's Goodison Park. The sensational Eusebio spurred an amazing comeback after the Koreans had gone 3-0 ahead in the first 25 minutes. He scored four goals to take Portugal to the semi-finals in their first-ever FIFA World Cup appearance. Despite the tears that flowed after defeat to eventual winners England, Portugal rallied to claim third place with a **2-1 victory over the Soviet Union**.



THE BLACK PANTHER

Born in Mozambique, **Eusebio** da Silva Ferreira was named Portugal's "Golden Player" to mark UEFA's 50th anniversary in 2004. Signed by Benfica in 1960 at the age of 18, he scored a hat-trick in his second game – against Santos in a friendly tournament in Paris – outshining their young star, Pele. He helped Benfica win a second European Cup in 1962, was named European Footballer of the Year in 1965 and led Portugal to third place in the 1966 FIFA World Cup, finishing as top scorer with nine goals. A phenomenal striker, he scored 320 goals in 313 Portuguese league matches, won the first European Golden Boot in 1968 (and earned a second in 1973). The world of football united in paying tribute to Eusebio after he died aged 71 in January 2014. Portugal declared three days of mourning, his statue at Benfica's Estadio da Luz home was transformed into a shrine, his coffin was carried around the pitch and the Benfica players wore his name on their backs during a 2-0 win over rivals Porto.



PRESIDENTIAL POWER

Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro got his second name because his father was a great fan of US President Ronald Reagan. He grew up supporting Benfica but began his career with arch-rivals Sporting Clube before securing a move to Manchester United in 2003. His stunning exploits during the 2007-08 season saw him win not only the Golden Boot as the league's top scorer on 31 goals but also helped him become only the third Portuguese player (after Eusebio and Luis Figo) to be awarded the Ballon d'Or, a feat he repeated in 2013 and 2014, 2016 and 2017. By the time Spanish giants Real Madrid paid €93.9 million to make him the most expensive footballer in history in 2009 Ronaldo had won three Premier League titles, the Champions League, an FA Cup, two League Cups and the FIFA Club World Cup. But if fans thought they'd seen the best of him they were about to be proved spectacularly wrong. Spending nine seasons in Madrid, Ronaldo scored a truly astonishing 451 goals in 438 games to become the club's all-time record goalscorer. His lethal finishing helping Real to win two La Liga titles, four Champions Leagues, two Copa del Reys, two UEFA Super Cups and three FIFA Club World Cups. In 2018 he departed to Juventus, where he scored 101 goals and won five major honours. Far from waning, in the summer of 2021, at the age of 36, he made a romantic return to Manchester United and celebrated by becoming the all-time international goalscorer with two headers against the Republic of Ireland in a World Cup qualifier.



THE FAMOUS FIVE

Eusebio, Mario Coluna, Jose Augusto, Antonio Simoes, and Jose Torres were the "Fabulous Five" in Benfica's 1960s Dream Team, who made up the spine of the Portuguese national side at the 1966 FIFA World Cup. Coluna (the "Sacred Monster"), scored the vital third goal in the 1961 European Cup final and captained the national side in 1966. Jose Augusto, who scored two goals in the opening game against Hungary, went on to manage the national side and later the Portuguese women's team. Antonio Simoes (the "Giant Gnome" – just 1.58 metres/5ft 3in tall) made his debut for Portugal and Benfica in 1962, aged just 18. Jose Torres – the only one of the five not to win the European Cup (though he played in the defeats in both 1963 and 1968) – scored the winner against Russia in the 1966 third-place match, and went on to manage the national side to their next appearance at the FIFA World Cup finals in 1986.

SLOW STARTERS

Portugal's triumph at Euro 2016 came with a deserved victory over hosts France in the final, but they were somewhat fortunate to make it there in the first place. The eventual winners drew all three of their group stage games, only qualifying as a third-place team for the knockout rounds. They became the first winners to fail to win in the opening stage and only had a single victory in normal time throughout the entire tournament. Portugal's wins over France and Croatia came after extra time, while they needed penalties to vanquish Poland. Their 2-0 semi-final win over Wales was more convincing, with the goals coming from Cristiano Ronaldo and Nani.

HAPPY HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY

Portugal celebrated their 100th birthday as a republic by beating newly crowned world champions Spain in a specially-arranged friendly in November 2010. The match not only marked the anniversary, but also celebrated the two countries' union in an ultimately unsuccessful bid to co-host the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Yet there was little equality in the match, Portugal sweeping to a 4-0 triumph – with two goals from **Helder Postiga** – slight consolation for losing to Spain in the FIFA World Cup second round five months earlier.



REP. OF IRELAND

It took a combination of astute management and endless searching through ancestral records before the Republic of Ireland finally qualified for the finals of a major tournament, at the 20th time of asking. But ever since Jack Charlton took the team to UEFA Euro 88, Ireland have remained one of Europe's most stubborn opponents, reaching the knockout stages at the 2002 World Cup and Euro 2016.



ROBBIE KEEN

The Republic of Ireland's all-time scoring record was taken by much-travelled striker **Robbie Keane** in October 2004 and he continued to add to it until his retirement – not least with last-minute equalizers against Germany and Spain at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. He marked the final game at the old Lansdowne Road with a hat-trick against San Marino in November 2006 – and, four years later, marked the inaugural game at the revamped replacement ground, the Aviva Stadium, with his 100th cap against Argentina. Ireland's 2-1 win over Macedonia in March 2011 was Keane's 41st match as captain – equalling the record set by Andy Townsend. He followed this up with two more matches as skipper, as Ireland beat Northern Ireland and Scotland in the British-based Carling Nations Cup. Keane also scored three goals in the two games, taking his overall tally to 49, before a double against Macedonia in June 2011 took him to 51. These made him the first player from the British Isles to score a half-century of international goals. Typically, Keane signed off in his final game for Ireland with a goal, scoring his 68th international strike in a friendly win against Oman in August 2016.



KILBANE KEEPS ON AND ON

Only England's Billy Wright, with 70, has played more consecutive internationals than **Kevin Kilbane**, whose 109th Republic of Ireland cap against Macedonia in March 2011 was also his 65th in a row, covering 11 years and five months. The versatile left-sider – nicknamed "Zinedine Kilbane" by fans – was given a rest for Ireland's next game three days later, though, a friendly against Uruguay.

KEANE CARRY-ON

Few star players have walked out on their country with quite the dramatic impact as Republic of Ireland captain **Roy Keane** in 2002 at their FIFA World Cup training camp in Saipan, Japan. The fiercely intense Manchester United skipper quit before a ball had been kicked, complaining about a perceived lack of professionalism in the Irish preparations – and his loss of faith in manager Mick McCarthy. Ireland reached the second round without him, losing on penalties to Spain, but his behaviour divided a nation. When McCarthy stepped down Keane and the Irish football federation brokered a truce, and he returned to international duty in April 2004 under new boss Brian Kerr. Few expected his second comeback, however, when he was appointed assistant to new manager Martin O'Neill in November 2013. O'Neill, who played 64 times for Northern Ireland, succeeded Italian veteran Giovanni Trapattoni, who resigned after failing to qualify for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. However, the double act wasn't to last – Keane and O'Neill both stepped down in 2018.



CHAMPION CHARLTON

Jack Charlton became a hero after he took Ireland to their first major finals in 1988, defeating England 1-0 in their first game at the UEFA European Championship. Things got even better at their first FIFA World Cup finals two years later, where the unfancied Irish lost out only to hosts Italy in the quarter-finals.



IT'S A GIVEN

The Republic of Ireland's second-most-capped player, goalkeeper Shay Given, bowed out of international football at the 2012 UEFA European Championship finals – the first major tournament his country had reached since the 2002 FIFA World Cup, when Given was also first-choice in goal. Despite going into UEFA Euro 2012 on a 14-game unbeaten run, the Irish lost all three games, to Croatia, Spain and Italy. The team's final match saw the captain's armband given to winger **Damien Duff**, as he became the fifth man to win a century of caps for Ireland. UEFA president Michel Platini praised the country's boisterous travelling fans and promised them a special award for their enthusiasm. Given, who gave all his international match fees to charity, announced his international retirement in the summer of 2012, following 55 clean sheets in 125 appearances, though he made a comeback in 2014 during Ireland's Euro 2016 qualifying campaign. One of his rivals has been Millwall goalkeeper David Forde, who was 33 when he faced Sweden in a FIFA World Cup qualifier in March 2013 – older than any other Ireland debutant in a competitive international.

MORE FOR MOORE

Paddy Moore was the first player ever to score four goals in a FIFA World Cup qualifier when Ireland came from behind to draw 4-4 with Belgium on 25 February 1934. Don Givens became the only Irishman to equal Moore's feat when he scored all four as Ireland beat Turkey 4-0 in October 1975.

CAPTAIN ALL-ROUND

Johnny Carey not only captained Matt Busby's Manchester United to the English league title in 1952, he also captained both Northern Ireland (nine caps) and later the Republic of Ireland (27 caps). He went on to manage the Republic of Ireland between 1955 and 1967.

HOORAY FOR RAY

Ray Houghton may have been born in Glasgow and spoke with a Scottish accent, but he scored two of Ireland's most famous goals. A header gave the Republic a shock 1-0 win over England at UEFA Euro 88 in West Germany and, six years later, his long-range strike was the only goal of the game against eventual finalists Italy, in the first round of the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the USA. It was exactly 18 years to the day from that 1994 shock that Ireland – now managed by Italian Giovanni Trapattoni – lost 2-0 to Italy in their third and final Group C match of the 2012 UEFA European Championship. Playing for Ireland that day was defender John O'Shea, who had previously been part of the Irish team that beat Italy 2-1 in the final of the 1998 UEFA European U-16s Championship final in Scotland. The Republic's only other continental title was the UEFA European U-19s Championship trophy they lifted by beating Germany, also in 1998.



TOP CAPS

1	Robbie Keane	146
2	Shay Given	134
3	John O'Shea	118
4	Kevin Kilbane	110
5	Steve Staunton	102
=	James McClean	102
7	Damien Duff	100
8	Aiden McGeady	93
9	Niall Quinn	91
=	Glenn Whelan	91

CROSSING THE CODES

Cornelius 'Con' Martin was a Gaelic footballer whose passion for soccer resulted in his expulsion from the Gaelic Athletic Association. His versatility meant he was as good at centre-half as he was in goal, both for club (Aston Villa) and country. He played both in goal and outfield for the fledgling Irish national team, scoring a penalty in the 2-0 victory over England at Goodison Park in 1949 – in what was England's first home defeat to a non-British opponent.



TOP SCORERS

1	Robbie Keane	68
2	Niall Quinn	21
3	Frank Stapleton	20
4	John Aldridge	19
=	Tony Cascarino	19
=	Don Givens	19
7	Shane Long	17
8	Noel Cantwell	14
=	Kevin Doyle	14
=	Jonathan Walters	14
11	Gerry Daly	13
=	Jimmy Dunne	13



ROMANIA

The history of Romanian football is littered with a series of bright moments – they were one of four countries (with Brazil, France and Belgium) to appear in the first three editions of the FIFA World Cup – followed by spells in the doldrums – since 1938 they have qualified for the finals of the tournament only four times in 14 attempts. The country's highlight came in 1994 when, inspired by Gheorghe Hagi, they reached the quarter-finals of the FIFA World Cup.





TOP CAPS

1	Dorinel Munteanu	134
2	Gheorghe Hagi	124
3	Gheorghe Popescu	115
4	Razvan Rat	113
5	Laszlo Boloni	102
6	Dan Petrescu	95
7	Bogdan Stelea	91
8	Michael Klein	89
9	Bogdan Lobont	86
10	Marius Lacatus	83
=	Mircea Rednic	83

FAMOUS FOURSOME

Gheorghe Hagi, Florin Raducioiu, Ilie Dumitrescu and **Gheorghe "Gica" Popescu** lit up the FIFA World Cup in the United States in 1994. Together they scored nine of Romania's ten goals (Raducioiu four, Hagi three, Dumitrescu two). All three successfully converted their penalties in the quarter-final shoot-out against Sweden, but misses from Dan Petrescu and Miodrag Belodedici sent the Romanians crashing out. All three made big-money moves for the following 1994–95 season: Hagi went from Brescia to Barcelona, Dumitrescu from Steaua Bucharest to Tottenham Hotspur and Raducioiu went from warming the bench at Milan to the first team at Espanyol. Defender/midfielder Popescu followed Dumitrescu to Spurs, and later won the UEFA European Cup Winners' Cup with Barcelona and was captain of Galatasaray when they became the first Turkish team to win a European trophy, the 2000 UEFA Cup. Popescu scored 16 goals in 115 appearances for Romania between 1998 and 2003, playing in the FIFA World Cups of 1990, 1994 and 1998, and the UEFA European Championships of 1996 and 2000. As well as being team-mates, Popescu and Hagi are also brothers-in-law – their wives, Luminita Popescu and Marlilena Hagi, are sisters.

BORDER CROSSING

Some 14 footballers played for both Romania, during the 1930s, and Hungary, during the 1940s – the most prolific being striker Iuliu Bodola, who scored 31 goals in 48 games for Romania, including appearances at the 1934 and 1938 FIFA World Cups, and four in 13 matches for his adopted homeland Hungary.

YELLOW PERIL

Despite topping Group G ahead of England, Colombia and Tunisia at the 1998 FIFA World Cup, Romania's players of that tournament might perhaps be best remembered for their collective decision to dye their hair blond ahead of their final first-round game. The **newly bleached Romanians** struggled to a 1-1 draw against Tunisia, before being knocked out by Croatia in the second round, 1-0.



TOP SCORERS

1	Gheorghe Hagi	35
=	Adrian Mutu	35
3	Iuliu Bodola	31
4	Viorel Moldovan	25
=	Ciprian Marica	25
6	Laszlo Boloni	23
7	Rodion Camataru	21
=	Dudu Georgescu	21
=	Anghel Iordanescu	21
=	Florin Raducioiu	21

CENTURY MAN

Gheorghe Hagi, Romania's "Player of the [twentieth] Century", scored three goals and was named in the Team of the Tournament at the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the United States, at which Romania lost out on penalties to Sweden after a 2-2 draw in the quarter-finals. Hagi made his international debut in 1983, aged just 18, scored his first goal aged 19 (in a 3-2 defeat to Northern Ireland) and remains Romania's joint-top goalscorer with 35 goals in 125 games. Despite retiring from international football after the 1998 FIFA World Cup, Hagi couldn't resist answering his country's call to play in UEFA Euro 2000. Sadly, two yellow-card offences in six minutes in the quarter-final against Italy meant Hagi's final bow on the international stage saw him receive a red card – and leave the field to take an early bath. Farul Constanta, in Hagi's hometown, named their stadium after him in 2000 – but fans stopped referring to it as such after he took the manager's job at rivals Timisoara.



CEMETERY SENTRY

It was second time luckier for former international striker Victor Piturca when he coached Romania at the 2008 UEFA European Championship in Austria and Switzerland, even though they were eliminated in the first round. He had previously been manager when the country qualified for the 2000 UEFA European Championship, but was forced out of the job before the tournament started following arguments with big-name players such as Gheorghe Hagi. Piturca's cousin Florin Piturca was also a professional footballer but died aged only 27 in 1978. Florin's father and Victor's uncle Maximilian, a cobbler, not only built a mausoleum for Florin but also slept at night in the cemetery until his own death in 1994.

ENDURING DORINEL

Dorinel Munteanu has played for Romania more times than any other although at one point his former team-mate Gheorghe Hagi's 125-cap record looked safe. Versatile defensive midfielder Munteanu was stuck on 119 appearances throughout an 18-month absence from the international scene before being surprisingly recalled at the age of 37 by manager Victor Piturca in February 2005. He ended his Romania career two years later, having scored 16 times in 134 games. Yet many Romanians believe he was wrongly denied a goal when a shot against Bulgaria at the 1996 UEFA European Championship appeared to bounce over the line, only to not be given. The match ended 1-0 to Bulgaria and Romania were eliminated in the first round following three straight defeats.

BROUGHT TO BUCHAREST

Romania's new national stadium in the capital Bucharest became the first in the country ever to stage a major European final, when it hosted the 2012 UEFA Europa League final in which Atletico Madrid beat fellow Spanish side Athletic Bilbao. The 55,200-capacity Arena Nationala was opened in September 2011, when Romania drew 0-0 with France. It has also been used by Steaua Bucharest and Dinamo Bucharest for league matches, Otelul Galati for UEFA Champions League games, and both Steaua and Rapid Bucharest for UEFA Europa League fixtures. The venue stands on the site of the old Stadionul National, built in 1953 and demolished 54 years later.

ADRIAN'S AID

Romania have only lost once when **Adrian Mutu** has scored – a fact made all the better for them since, with 35 goals, he is (with Gheorghe Hagi) his country's all-time leading goalscorer. Mutu drew level with Hagi with a FIFA World Cup qualifying game equaliser against Hungary in March 2013, though this was his first international goal in 21 months. Unfortunately for Romania, controversy has followed their finest player of the 21st century: he has been banned twice for failed drugs tests. The first came after a test carried out by his club employers Chelsea in September 2004 showed traces of cocaine and brought about his dismissal. After a seven-month ban he rehabilitated his career in Italy, first with Juventus and then Fiorentina, before receiving a nine-month suspension after he tested positive for a banned anti-obesity drug in January 2010. He did score against Italy at the 2008 UEFA European Championship, Romania's only goal at the tournament.



RUSSIA

Before the break-up of the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1992, the team was a world football powerhouse, winning the first UEFA European Championship in 1960, gold at the 1956 and 1988 Olympic Games and qualifying for the FIFA World Cup on seven occasions. Playing as Russia since August 1992, the good times have eluded them – apart from being UEFA Euro 2008 semi-finalists. They did, however, reach the 2014 FIFA World Cup, and they went even further when hosting the 2018 edition, beating Spain on penalties to reach the quarter-finals. However, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 the national team has been banned from all competitions.



TOP SCORERS

1	Aleksandr Kerzhakov	30
2	Artem Dzyuba	30
3	Vladimir Beschastnykh	26
4	Roman Pavlyuchenko	21
5	Andrey Arshavin	17
=	Valeri Karpin	17
7	Fyodor Smolov	16
8	Dmitri Sychev	15
9	Roman Shirokov	13
10	Igor Kolyvanov	12
=	Denis Cheryshev	12

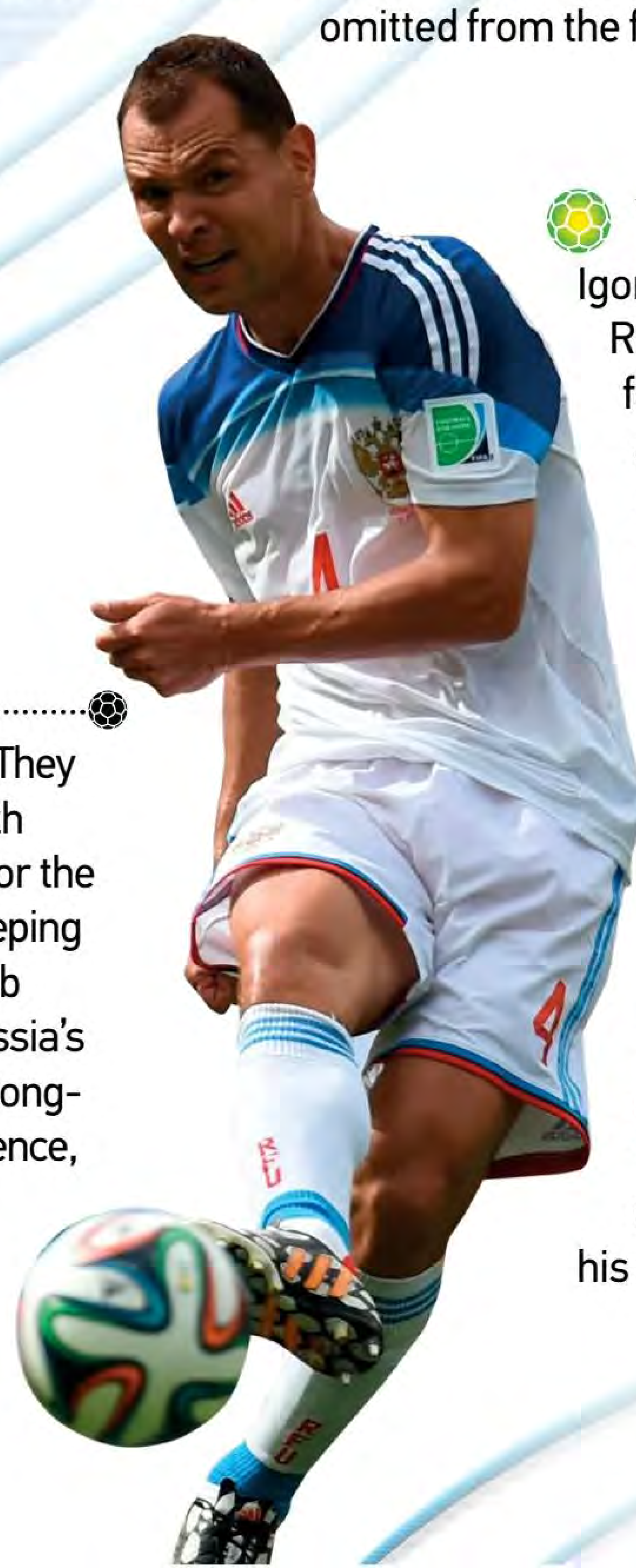
KERZH LIFTS HIS CURSE

Only one man was in Russia's squads for the 2002 FIFA World Cup finals and the next time they qualified, in 2014: **Aleksandr Kerzhakov**. He was a teenager in 2002, having made his international debut three months earlier, and he played just eight minutes of the finals. Kerzhakov, still only 31 in Brazil, scored his 26th international goal to earn a 1-1 draw in Russia's opener against South Korea. He thus matched Russia's all-time scoring record set by 2002 team-mate Vladimir Beschastnykh. Kerzhakov, with five goals, was Russia's leading scorer in qualifying for the 2014 finals, but unlike in 2008 – when he was five-goal top-scorer in UEFA European Championships qualifying – this time he was not omitted from the finals squad.



HOME RANGE

Russia were the only country at the 2014 FIFA World Cup whose entire 23-man squad played their club football domestically. Dynamo Moscow had six players and CSKA Moscow five, including defender **Sergei Ignashevich** who reached a century of caps in the final Group H game against Algeria. They may have had the highest-paid coach at the tournament, with Fabio Capello earning a reported £6.69million per year, but for the second FIFA World Cup running he was undone by a goalkeeping error in the opening game: in 2010 he watched England's Rob Green fumble in a shot from the USA's Clint Dempsey; in Russia's 2014 opener, keeper Igor Akinfeev suffered similarly with a long-range effort by South Korea's Lee Keun-Ho. And, by coincidence, both lapses were equalizers in 1-1 draws.



YOUNG PROMISE

Igor Akinfeev became post-Soviet Russia's youngest international footballer when he made his debut in a friendly against Norway on 28 April 2004. The CSKA Moscow goalkeeper was just 18 years and 20 days old. The following season would be perhaps just as memorable for him, clinching a domestic league and cup double with his club while also lifting the UEFA Cup as CSKA Moscow became post-Soviet Russia's first side to win a UEFA club trophy. The youngest Soviet-era debutant was Eduard Streltsov, who hit a hat-trick on his debut against Sweden in June 1956, at the age of 17 years and 340 days and then scored another treble in his second game, against India.



PUTTING ON THE STYLE

As a professional footballer who has a diploma in fashion design, perhaps it is no surprise **Andrey Arshavin** could strut across the pitch with a certain élan as the most skilful of Russia's 21st-century players. Even after missing the first two games of the 2008 UEFA European Championship through suspension, the Russia captain dazzled with his performances in his team's next two matches – especially a 3-1 quarter-final triumph over the Netherlands. Just a month earlier, Arshavin had been central as Zenit St Petersburg lifted the UEFA Cup, although his later spell with English club Arsenal proved patchier before his release in summer 2013. Arshavin's image back home was tainted a little when he argued with fans after their Euro 2012 first-round exit – and he then lost the captaincy under new coach Fabio Capello. Yet, on his day, this natty man with an eye for an outfit could prove a cut above.

TOP CAPS

1	Sergei Ignashevich	127
2	Igor Akinfeev	111
3	Viktor Onopko	109
4	Yuri Zhirkov	105
5	Vasili Berezutskiy	101
6	Aleksandr Kerzhakov	90
7	Aleksandr Anyukov	76
8	Andrey Arshavin	74
9	Valeri Karpin	72
10	Vladimir Beschastnykh	71



A WORK OF ART

In 2018, Russia hosted their first ever FIFA World Cup and their performance gave their fans plenty of reasons to be optimistic for the future. They reached the quarter-finals for the first time in the post-Soviet era, losing to eventual finalists Croatia in a penalty shoot-out after overcoming 2010 world champions Spain in the Round of 16. Standout performers for the hosts were midfielder Denis Cheryshev and striker **Artem Dzyuba**, who ended the tournament as Russia's top scorer with three goals. They opened in spectacular style, thrashing Saudi Arabi 5-0, the biggest win by a host nation in an opening World Cup game since 1934. Russia went on to beat Egypt 3-1 to finish as group runners-up behind Uruguay and progress to the knockout stage.

SUPER STOPPER

FIFA declared **Lev Yashin** to be the finest goalkeeper of the 20th century – naturally, he made it into their Century XI team, too. In a career spanning 20 years, Yashin played 326 league games for Dynamo Moscow – the only club side he ever played for – and won 78 caps for the Soviet Union, conceding on average less than a goal a game (only 70 in total). With Dynamo, he won five Soviet championships and three Soviet cups, the last of which came in his final full season in 1970. He saved around 150 penalties in his long career, and kept four clean sheets in his 12 FIFA World Cup matches. Such was Yashin's worldwide reputation, Chilean international Eladio Rojas was so excited at scoring past the legendary Yashin in the 1962 FIFA World Cup that he gave the surprised keeper a big hug with the ball still sitting in the back of the net. Yashin was nicknamed the "Black Spider" for his distinctive black jersey and his uncanny ability to get a hand, arm, leg or foot in the way of shots and headers of all kinds. In 1963, Yashin became the first, and so far only, keeper to be named European Footballer of the Year, the same year in which he won his fifth Soviet championship and starred for the Rest of the World XI in the English FA's Centenary Match at Wembley.



CAPPING IT ALL

Viktor Onopko, despite being born in the Ukraine, played all his career for the CIS and Russian national football teams. The first of Onopko's 113 international caps (the first four for the CIS) came in a 2-2 draw against England in Moscow on 29 April 1992. He played in the 1994 and 1998 FIFA World Cups, as well as the UEFA European Championship in 1996. He was due to join the squad for the UEFA European Championship in 2004 but missed out through injury. Onopko's club career, spanning 19 years, took him to Shakhtar Donetsk, Spartak Moscow, Real Oviedo, Rayo Vallecano, Alania Vladikavkaz and FC Saturn. He was Russian footballer of the year in 1993 and 1994.

GOLDEN BOY

Igor Netto captained the USSR national side to their greatest successes: gold at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne and victory in the first-ever UEFA European Championship in France in 1960. Born in Moscow in 1930, Netto was awarded the Order of Lenin in 1957 and became an ice hockey coach after retiring from football.



SCOTLAND



A country with a vibrant domestic league and a rich football tradition – it played host to the first-ever international football match, against England, in November 1872 – Scotland have never put in the performances on the international stage to match their lofty ambitions. There have been moments of triumph, such as an unexpected victory over Holland at the 1978 FIFA World Cup, but far too many moments of despair. Even so, under the stewardship of Steve Clarke they qualified for EURO 2020, their first tournament since 1998. Clarke then steered the Scots to EURO 2024, but they lost twice and crashed out in the group stages.



TOP SCORERS

1	Kenny Dalglish	30
=	Denis Law	30
3	Hughie Gallacher	24
4	Lawrie Reilly	22
5	Ally McCoist	19
6	Kenny Miller	18
=	John McGinn	18
8	Robert Hamilton	15
=	James McFadden	15
10	Maurice Johnston	14
11	Bob McColl	13



DON'T COME HOME TOO SOON

Scotland's 2-0 defeat to Serbia in March 2013 gave them the unenviable record of being the first European country eliminated from the 2014 FIFA World Cup – denying them a chance to get beyond the first round of the finals for the first time. **Gordon Strachan**, who scored five goals in 50 games for Scotland in midfield between 1980 and 1992, had replaced the sacked Craig Levein in January 2013.

THE LAWMAN

Denis Law is joint top scorer for Scotland with Kenny Dalglish, scoring 30 goals in only 55 games compared to the 102 it took Dalglish to do the same. Law twice scored four goals in a match for Scotland. First against Northern Ireland on 7 November 1962, helping win the British Home Championships. He repeated the feat against Norway in a friendly on 7 November 1963. Law clearly enjoyed playing against Norway, having grabbed a hat-trick in Bergen just five months earlier.

KING KENNY

Kenny Dalglish is Scotland's joint-top international goalscorer (with Denis Law) and remains the only player to have won more than a century of caps for the national side, with 102 in total – 11 more than the next highest cap-winner, goalkeeper Jim Leighton. Despite growing up a Rangers fan (he was born in Glasgow on 4 March 1951), Dalglish made his name spear-heading Celtic's domestic dominance in the 1970s, winning four league titles, four Scottish Cups and one League Cup. He then went on to become a legend at Liverpool, winning a hat-trick of European Cups (1978, 1981 and 1984) and leading the side as player-manager to their first-ever league and cup double in 1986. He later joined Herbert Chapman and Brian Clough as one of the few managers to lead two different sides to the league title – guiding Blackburn Rovers to the summit of English football in 1994–95. For Scotland, Dalglish scored at both the 1978 and 1982 FIFA World Cup finals, netting the first goal in the famous 3-2 victory over eventual runners-up Holland in the 1978 group stages. He played his last international in 1986.



ROOM FOR ONE MORE?

Hampden Park, Scotland's national stadium, boasts the record for the highest-ever football attendance in Europe. The crowd was so huge no one can be quite sure how many squeezed in to watch Scotland v England in 1937, though the official figure is usually quoted as 149,415. Scotland won the British Home Championship tie 3-1, though they ended runners-up to Wales in the overall tournament. Since being redeveloped in 1999, Hampden Park has hosted almost all of Scotland's home internationals. The first to be played elsewhere was a 2008 UEFA European Championship qualifier against the Faroe Islands in September 2006, when Celtic Park in Glasgow was used instead – Hampden having been pre-booked for a concert by pop star Robbie Williams.

I HAVEN'T FELT THIS GOOD SINCE ARCHIE GEMMILL SCORED AGAINST HOLLAND



Archie Gemmill scored Scotland's greatest goal on the world stage in the surprise 3-2 victory over Holland at the 1978 FIFA World Cup. He jinked past three defenders before chipping the ball neatly over Dutch goalkeeper Jan Jongbloed. Amazingly, in 2008, this magical moment was turned into a dance in the English National Ballet's "The Beautiful Game".

DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Scottish-born winger Jim Brown played and scored for the USA side which lost to Argentina in the first FIFA World Cup in 1930. He had moved to New Jersey three years earlier and qualified through his US citizen father. Two of his brothers also played professionally: younger brother John, a goalkeeper, was capped by Scotland, but Tom did not play at international level. Jim's son George appeared once for the USA, in 1957, while two of John's sons, Peter and Gordon, both played rugby for Scotland.

The first brothers to play for different countries, were John and Archie Goodall – members of Preston North End's 1888–89 league and FA Cup double-winning squad – and although their parents were both Scottish, London-born John played for England and Belfast-born Archie represented Ireland. Another pair of brothers with Scottish parents were Joe and Gerry Baker – though Joe chose to play for England in the 1960s and Gerry appeared for the USA.

RECENT REMATCH

The world's oldest international fixture was staged for the first time in four years when England hosted Scotland in a Group D Euro 2020 clash at a raucous Wembley Stadium on 18 June 2021. Having won their opening game against Croatia 1-0, Gareth Southgate's men were hoping to secure qualification for the knockout stages with a second victory, but Scotland (despite reeling from a 2-0 defeat to the Czech Republic at Hampden Park in their opening game) dug deep for a 0-0 draw.



WEIR ON THE BALL

Rugged Rangers centre-back **David Weir** became Scotland's oldest international footballer when he faced Lithuania in a 2012 UEFA European Championship qualifier on 3 September 2010, aged 40 years and 111 days, for his 66th appearance. He was still representing his country three caps and 39 days later, against reigning world and European champions Spain.

TOP CAPS

1	Kenny Dalglish	102
2	Jim Leighton	91
3	Darren Fletcher	80
4	Alex McLeish	77
5	Paul McStay	76
6	Andrew Robertson	76
7	Craig Gordon	75
8	John McGinn	71
9	Kenny Miller	69
=	David Weir	69

UNOFFICIAL WORLD CHAMPIONS



One of the victories most cherished by Scotland fans is the **3-2 triumph** over arch-rivals and reigning world champions England in April 1967 at Wembley – the first time Sir Alf Ramsey's team had lost since clinching the 1966 FIFA World Cup. Scotland's man of the match that day was ball-juggling left-half/midfielder Jim Baxter, while it was also the first game in charge for Scotland's first full-time manager, Bobby Brown. Less fondly recalled is Scotland's 9-3 trouncing by the same opposition at the same stadium in April 1961, which made unfortunate goalkeeper Frank Haffey the butt of a popular joke that did the rounds across the border in England: "What's the time? Nearly 10 past Haffey." The game was Haffey's second – and last – for Scotland.

SERBIA

The former Yugoslavia was one of the strongest football nations in eastern Europe. They reached the FIFA World Cup semi-finals in 1930 and 1962, and they were also runners-up in the UEFA European Championships of 1960 and 1968. A stunning late 2-1 victory over Portugal in Lisbon in November 2021 secured Serbia's place at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where they ultimately finished bottom of their group. Serbia reached EURO 2024, drawing twice and losing to England.



TOP CAPS

1	Dusan Tadic	111
2	Branislav Ivanovic	105
3	Dejan Stankovic	103
4	Savo Milosevic	102
5	Aleksandar Kolarov	94
=	Aleksandar Mitrovic	94
7	Dragan Dzajic	85
8	Dragan Stojkovic	84
=	Vladimir Stojkovic	84
10	Zoran Tosic	76



MAGIC DRAGAN

Yugoslavia's greatest player was Red Star left winger **Dragan Dzajic**, who later went on to become the club's president. He made his international debut at 18, won a national record 85 caps and scored 23 goals. The most important was his last-minute winner against world champions England in the 1968 UEFA European Championship semi-final in Florence, which took Yugoslavia to the final against Italy. Pele said of Dzajic: "He's a real wizard. I'm sorry he's not Brazilian."

YUGOSLAVIA HIT BY BOYCOTT

The rivalry between Serbia and Croatia was apparent even in the early days of the old federation. Yugoslavia reached the last four of the inaugural FIFA World Cup in 1930, but they did so without any Croat players, who boycotted the squad for the finals in protest at the new federal association headquarters being located in the Serb capital, Belgrade.



SAVICEVIC STRIKES

Dejan Savicevic is Serbia's greatest player of the modern era. The attacking midfielder was a key member of Red Star Belgrade's 1991 European Cup-winning team. He also inspired them to three consecutive championships. He moved on to Milan and starred as his new club beat Barcelona 4-0 in the 1994 European Cup final. He created the opening goal, then crashed home a 35-yard volley. Savicevic later became a prominent supporter of the drive for Montenegrin independence from Serbia and was credited with playing an influential role in the referendum vote on 21 May 2006 that led to the establishment of a separate Montenegrin state.

TOP SCORERS

	Player	Goals
1	Aleksandar Mitrovic	58
2	Stjepan Bobek	38
3	Mian Galic	37
=	Savo Milosevic	37
=	Blagoje Marjanovic	37
6	Rajko Mitic	32
7	Dusan Bajevic	29
8	Todor Veselinovic	28
9	Predrag Mijatovic	27
10	Borivoje Kostic	26



STAN'S THE MAN

Midfielder **Dejan Stankovic** is the only man to have represented three different countries at separate FIFA World Cups, playing for Yugoslavia in 2002, Serbia and Montenegro in 2006, and Serbia in 2010. His pragmatic comment on his achievement was: "I'm happy with the record, but I'd rather win. It's OK to have been in three World Cups, but I would have liked to have better results." Stankovic scored twice on his international debut for Yugoslavia in 1998. He has also twice scored memorable volleyed goals from virtually on the halfway line – once for Internazionale against Genoa in 2009–10, with a first-time shot from the opposing goalkeeper's clearance, and an almost identical finish against German club FC Schalke 04 in the UEFA Champions League the following season. Stankovic tied Savo Milosevic's Serbian appearances record with his final competitive international in October 2011, but went one better in October 2013, when playing the first ten minutes of a 2-0 friendly defeat of Japan at Novi Sad.

SAV A GO HERO

Savo Milosevic was the first Serbian player to reach a century of international appearances – and he can claim to have played for his country in four different guises, representing Yugoslavia before and after it broke up, Serbia & Montenegro and finally Serbia alone. Milosevic's 100th international appearance was memorable for the wrong reasons, coming in a 6-0 defeat to Argentina at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. He returned to the fold for a final, farewell match: a friendly against Bulgaria on 19 November 2008. Milosevic played only the first 34 minutes yet managed not only to score twice but also miss two penalties. He joked: "Maybe those 34 minutes sum up my career, in the best possible way, with good moments and bad times, when you are at the top and at the bottom. Believe me, I have never missed two penalties before – not even in training."



BRAN POWER

Versatile Chelsea defender and Serbia captain **Branislav Ivanovic** enjoyed scoring significant late goals against Portuguese opposition. His first goal for his country was an 88th-minute equalizer in a UEFA European Championship qualifier away to Portugal in 2007. His stoppage-time header gave Chelsea victory over Benfica in the final of the 2013 UEFA Europa League, a year after suspension ruled him out of the club's UEFA Champions League triumph over Bayern Munich.



MILORAD'S MILESTONE

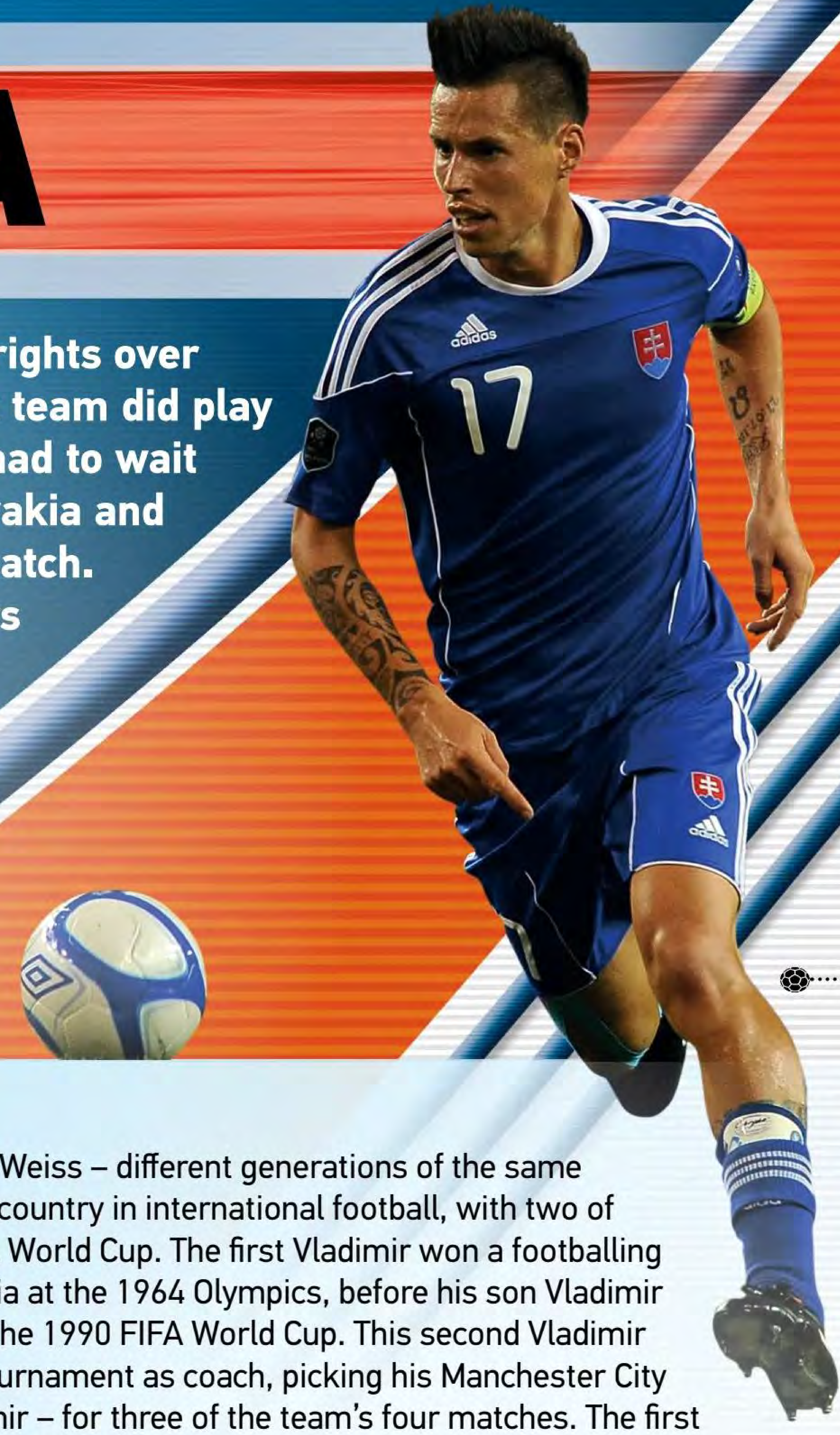
The first man to captain and then coach his country at the FIFA World Cup was Milorad Arsenijevic, who captained Yugoslavia to the semi-finals at the inaugural tournament in Uruguay in 1930 and then managed their squad in Brazil 20 years later.

GOING IT ALONE

After Serbia and Montenegro competed at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the 2010 tournament was the first featuring Serbia alone following Montenegro's independence. Topping their qualifying group ahead of France, Radomir Antic's Serbian side failed to make it through to the knockout stages in South Africa, despite a single-goal victory over Group D rivals Germany. A Serbian working for an opposing team was partly to blame – Milovan Rajevac was coach of the Ghana side that beat Serbia 1-0 in their opening first-round match. A mainstay in the Serbian defence was dominating centre-back **Nemanja Vidic**, a 2008 UEFA Champions League-winner and hero at Manchester United – but he announced his retirement from international football in October 2011.

SLOVAKIA

Slovakia have finally begun claiming bragging rights over their neighbours, the Czech Republic. A Slovak team did play games during the Second World War but then had to wait until post-war Czechoslovakia divided into Slovakia and the Czech Republic in 1993 before their next match. They returned to competitive action in qualifiers for the 1996 UEFA European Championship, finishing a promising third in their group. Continuing gradual progress culminated in qualification for their first FIFA World Cup, in 2010, at which they upset defending champions Italy 3-2 and reached the second round. They have since reached Euro 2016, 2020 and 2024.



VLAD ALL OVER

Three relatives named Vladimir Weiss – different generations of the same family – have represented their country in international football, with two of them featuring at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The first Vladimir won a footballing silver medal with Czechoslovakia at the 1964 Olympics, before his son Vladimir played for the same country at the 1990 FIFA World Cup. This second Vladimir then led Slovakia to the 2010 tournament as coach, picking his Manchester City winger son – yet another Vladimir – for three of the team's four matches. The first Vladimir made three appearances for Czechoslovakia, including the 1964 Olympics final in which he scored an own goal as Hungary triumped 2-1. The second Vladimir won 19 caps for Czechoslavakia and 12 for Slovakia, and the third, then aged only 20, ended the 2010 FIFA World Cup with 12. By the summer of 2014, the youngest Weiss had moved to 33 appearances. The coach described their 3-2 victory over holders Italy at the 2010 FIFA World Cup as the second happiest day of his life – only beaten by the day his son was born. He stepped down as boss after failing to qualify for the 2012 UEFA European Championship.



HOMEMADE MARIAN

Marian Masny holds the international appearances record for Slovak-born footballers who played for the united Czechoslovakia, earning 75 caps between 1974 and 1982. Masny, from Rybany, was also the second-highest-scoring Slovak during the united Czechoslovakia era. His 18 goals were only bettered by the 22 in 36 matches struck by Vrutky-born Adolf Scherer from 1958 to 1964. Scherer's tally included three at the 1962 FIFA World Cup, when Czechoslovakia finished runners-up. Scherer scored the winner against Hungary in the quarter-finals and Czechoslovakia's final goal in their 3-1 semi-final victory over Yugoslavia.

TOP SCORERS

1	Marek Hamsik	26
2	Robert Vittek	23
3	Szilard Nemeth	22
4	Robert Mak	16
5	Ondrej Duda	15
6	Miroslav Karhan	14
=	Marek Mintal	14
=	Juraj Kucka	14
9	Stanislav Sestak	13
=	Adam Nemec	13
11	Peter Dubovsky	12
12	Martin Jakubko	9

MAREK OFF THE MARK

Slovakia's biggest win is 7-0, a result they have achieved three times – with wing-back Marek Cech the only man to play in all three games: against Liechtenstein in September 2004 and twice versus San Marino, in October 2007 and June 2009. He scored twice in the most recent match and in fact four of his five international goals since his 2004 debut came against San Marino – he also scored a brace in a 5-0 victory in November 2007.

TOP CAPS

1	Marek Hamsik	138
2	Peter Pekarik	132
3	Juraj Kucka	112
4	Miroslav Karhan	107
5	Martin Skrtel	104
6	Jan Durica	91
7	Robert Vittek	82
8	Robert Mak	81
9	Ondrej Duda	78
10	Vladimir Weiss	77

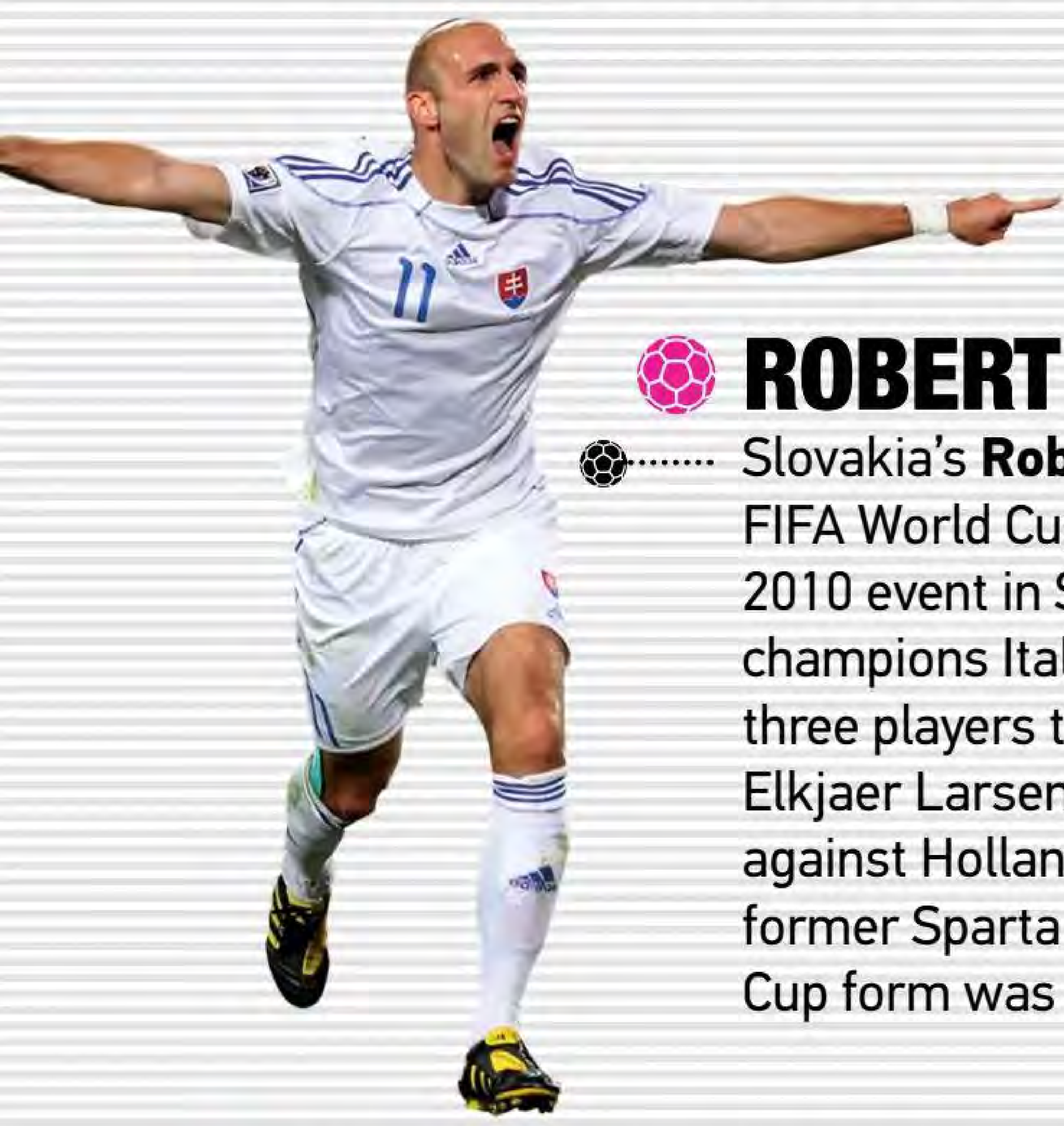


CZECH EIGHT

Eight Slovakia players played in Czechoslovakia's triumphant 1976 UEFA European Championship final against West Germany, including captain Anton Ondrus and both their scorers in the 2-2 draw: Jan Svehlik and Karol Dobias. Three of the team's successful penalty-takers in their 5-3 shoot-out win were Slovak-born: Marian Masny, Ondrus and substitute Ladislav Jurkemik. The other Slovaks to feature were Jan Pivarnik, Jozef Capkovic and Jozef Moder. Defender Koloman Gogh was born in what is now the Czech Republic, but had Slovak family ties and played most of his club football for Slovan Bratislava in the Slovak capital.

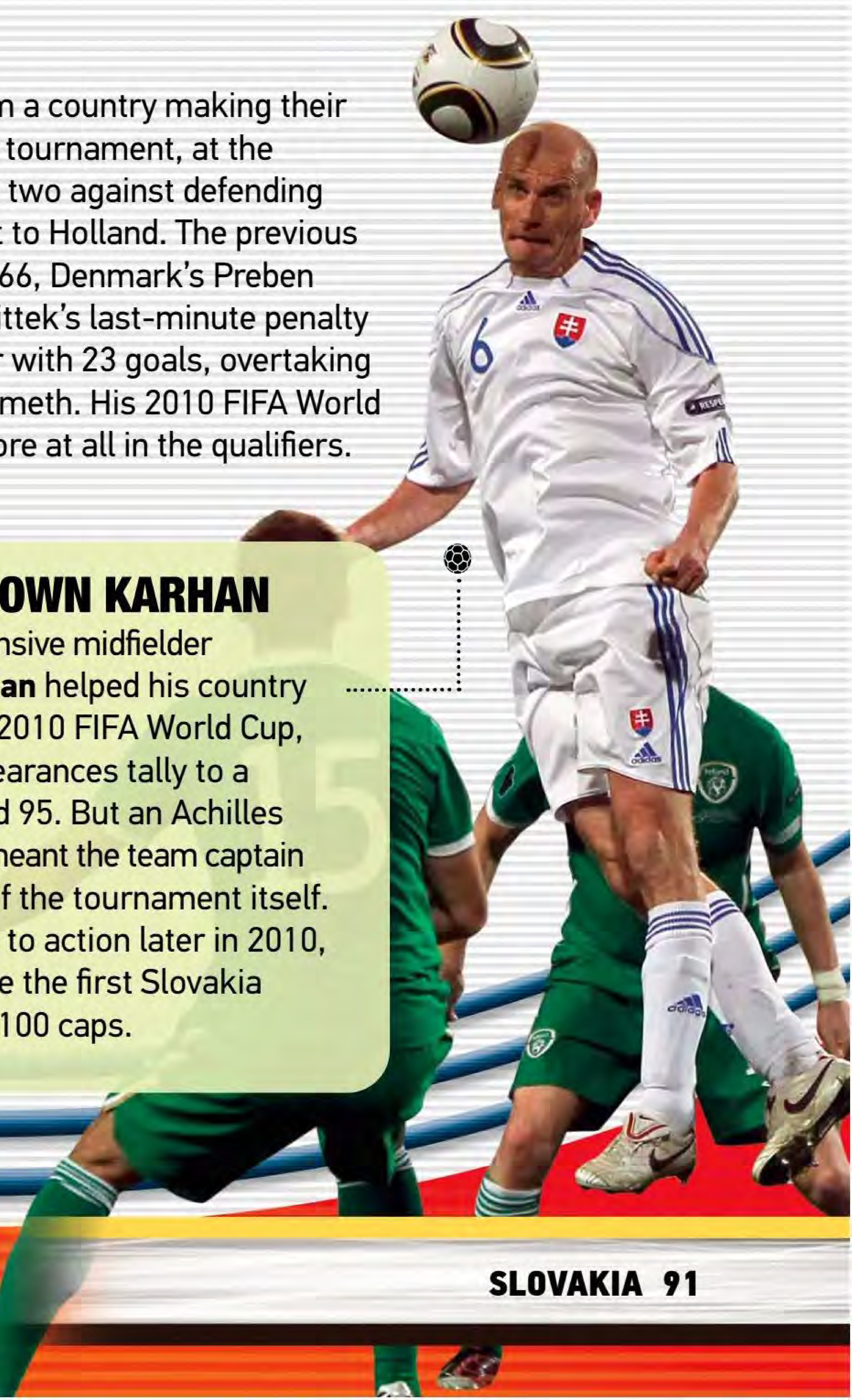
SKRTEL'S A CERT

Slovakia captain and centre-back **Martin Skrtel** has won his country's Footballer of the Year award four times since it was introduced in 1993. He collected the prize in 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012 – with the only player winning more being national team-mate Marek Hamsik, who was the winner in 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014 and 2015. He equalled defender Dusan Tittel's record of three consecutive wins – in 1993, 1994 and 1995.



ROBERT THE HERO

Slovakia's **Robert Vittek** became only the fourth player from a country making their FIFA World Cup debut to score as many as four goals in one tournament, at the 2010 event in South Africa. He hit one against New Zealand, two against defending champions Italy, and a late penalty in a second-round defeat to Holland. The previous three players to have done so were Portugal's Eusebio in 1966, Denmark's Preben Elkjaer Larsen in 1986 and Croatia's Davor Suker in 1998. Vittek's last-minute penalty against Holland made him Slovakia's all-time leading scorer with 23 goals, overtaking former Sparta Prague and Middlesbrough striker Szilard Nemeth. His 2010 FIFA World Cup form was all the more striking since he had failed to score at all in the qualifiers.



CUTTING-EDGE HAMSIK

Playmaker Marek Hamsik was just 17 when he left Slovakia in 2004 – after only six games for Slovan Bratislava – and moved to Italy, joining Brescia, then Napoli. After helping Napoli to win the 2012 Coppa Italia, he fulfilled a promise to shave off his Mohawk hairstyle. Hamsik captained Slovakia at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, where he helped to eliminate Italy in the opening round. It was a less happy story for Hamsik and Slovakia when it came to qualifying for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Slovakia finished a disappointing third behind Greece and Bosnia & Herzegovina. They recovered to qualify for Euro 2016, where Hamsik scored a stunning winner against Russia in Group B.

BROKEN-DOWN KARHAN

Slovakia's defensive midfielder **Miroslav Karhan** helped his country qualify for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, taking his appearances tally to a national-record 95. But an Achilles tendon injury meant the team captain was ruled out of the tournament itself. After returning to action later in 2010, Karhan became the first Slovakia player to pass 100 caps.

SWEDEN



Twelve appearances at the FIFA World Cup finals (with a best result of second, as tournament hosts, in 1958) and three Olympic medals (including gold in London in 1948), bear testament to Sweden's rich history on the world football stage. Recent success has been harder to find, however, with semi-final appearances at the 1992 UEFA European Championship (again as hosts) and the 1994 FIFA World Cup the country's best performances in recent years. Sweden failed to reach the 2022 World Cup and missed out on EURO 2024.



GRE-NO-LI OLYMPIC AND ITALIAN GLORY

Having conquered the world by leading Sweden to gold in the 1948 Olympics in London, Gunnar Gren, Gunnar Nordahl and **Nils Liedholm** were snapped up by AC Milan. Their three-pronged "Gre-No-Li" forward line led the Italian giants to their 1951 scudetto win. Nordahl, who topped the Serie A scoring charts five times between 1950 and 1955, remains Milan's all-time top scorer with 221 goals in 268 games. Gren and Liedholm went on to appear for the Swedish national team in the 1958 FIFA World Cup – where they finished runners-up.

TOP CAPS

1	Anders Svensson	148
2	Thomas Ravelli	143
3	Andreas Isaksson	133
=	Sebastian Larsson	133
5	Kim Kallstrom	131
6	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	122
7	Olof Mellberg	117
8	Roland Nilsson	116
9	Bjorn Nordqvist	115
10	Niclas Alexandersson	109



ONE MORE ENCORE, AGAIN!

One of the most famous and decorated Swedish footballers of modern times, **Henrik Larsson** (a star on the club scene with both Celtic and Barcelona) quit international football after the 2002 FIFA World Cup ... and again after the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. He then made a further comeback in the 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifiers. With 37 goals in his 106 appearances, including five in his three FIFA World Cups, fans and officials clamoured for his return each time he tried to walk away. Sweden's failure to qualify for the tournament in 1998 meant a record-equalling 12 years elapsed between Larsson's first FIFA World Cup finals goal against Bulgaria in 1994 and his last, a dramatic late equalizer in a 2-2 group-stage draw with England in 2006. After finally retiring for good in 2009, he became manager of Swedish second-tier club Landskrona BoIS.

TOP STOPPER RAVELLI

Thomas Ravelli kept goal for Sweden a record 143 times – conceding 143 goals. He saved two penalties in a shoot-out against Romania in the 1994 FIFA World Cup quarter-final to send Sweden into the last four, where they lost 1-0 to Brazil. Sweden went on to finish third, and were also the tournament's highest scorers with 15 goals in all – four more than eventual champions Brazil. Sweden's tally included five for Kennet Andersson, four for Martin Dahlin and three for Tomas Brolin.



IBRA-CADABRA

Few footballers these days can claim such consistent success – nor boast such an ego – as Swedish forward **Zlatan Ibrahimovic**. His proclamations have included "There's only one Zlatan", "I am like Muhammad Ali" and – in response to criticism from Norway's John Carew – "What Carew does with a football, I can do with an orange." Yet his clubs, including Ajax in the Netherlands, Juventus, Internazionale and AC Milan in Italy, Barcelona in Spain, Paris Saint-Germain in France and Manchester United in England, have all benefited from his presence; he has won 12 league titles since 2002. He christened the newly built Friends Arena in Solna with all four goals as Sweden beat England 4-2 in a November 2012 friendly – his final goal topping the lot, a 30-yard overhead kick which won the FIFA Ferenc Puskas goal of the year award. Ibrahimovic thus became the first player in 915 matches to score four goals in one game against England. Other notable strikes include a back-heel volley against Italy at the 2004 UEFA European Championship and a long-range volley versus France at Euro 2012. Malmo-born Ibrahimovic made his Sweden debut in January 2001 and went on to score 62 goals in 116 appearances over a 15-year period. He scored three of Sweden's four goals in their 4-3 aggregate win over Denmark in the Euro 2016 qualification playoffs but called time on his international career after his side exited the tournament at the group stage. Yet the call of the international game proved impossible to ignore, and Sweden's greatest scorer returned for Euro 2020 only to be ruled out with a knee injury.

ANDERS KEEPERS

Midfielder Anders Svensson celebrated equalling Thomas Ravelli's Sweden appearances record by scoring in both his 142nd and 143rd games for his country: a long-range strike as Norway were beaten 4-2 and then the winning goal against the Republic of Ireland in a qualifier for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. He then became his country's most-capped player in a 1-0 victory over Kazakhstan, but he didn't score. Svensson retired from international football in 2013, aged 37, after Sweden lost to Portugal in the qualifying play-off. He made 148 appearances, and scored 21 goals.



TOP SCORERS

1	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	62
2	Sven Rydell	49
3	Gunnar Nordahl	43
4	Henrik Larsson	37
5	Gunnar Gren	32
6	Kennet Andersson	31
7	Marcus Allback	30
8	Martin Dahlin	29
9	Tomas Brolin	27
=	Agne Simonsson	27

MAGICAL MELL

Commanding centre-back **Olof Mellberg** became one of only seven players to appear at four different UEFA European Championship finals when he took part at Euro 2012 – and was the first Swede to achieve the feat. The 34-year-old also became Sweden's oldest UEFA European Championship goalscorer when he headed them into a 2-1 lead against England, ten minutes after his shot led to Glen Johnson scoring an own goal to draw the Swedes level. Unfortunately for Mellberg, and Sweden, however, England hit back to win 3-2. Mellberg's six previous goals for his country had all come in qualifying matches for either the UEFA European Championship or the FIFA World Cup.

FOUR SQUARE

In October 2012, Sweden became the first team to claw back a four-goal deficit against Germany, when they recovered from 4-0 down to finish 4-4 in a 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifier – thanks to second-half goals from Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Mikael Lustig, Johan Elmander and Rasmus Elm.



MANAGER SWAP

The most successful manager Sweden ever had was Englishman **George Raynor**, who led them to Olympic gold in London in 1948 and steered Sweden to third place and the runners-up spot in the 1950 and 1958 FIFA World Cups respectively. Raynor got one over on the country of his birth when Sweden became only the second foreign side to win at Wembley, with a 3-2 victory over England in 1959. Working in the opposite direction, in 2001 Sven-Goran Eriksson left Serie A side Lazio to become England's first foreign coach. He led the side to three consecutive quarter-finals – in the FIFA World Cups of 2002 and 2006 and, in between, the 2004 UEFA European Championship. Eriksson, however, failed to lead England to a win over his home country, recording three draws (1-1 in a 2001 friendly; 1-1 in a 2002 FIFA World Cup group game; 2-2 in a 2006 FIFA World Cup group game) and one defeat (0-1 in a 2004 friendly).

KLAS ACT

Midfielder Klas Ingesson helped Sweden finish third at the 1994 FIFA World Cup but after retiring in 2001 opted for a very different career: working as a lumberjack on his farm and 815-hectare wood. Yet he was tempted back into football, in management, and pursued that path even after being diagnosed with an incurable form of cancer in 1999. He took joint charge of IF Elfsborg in September 2013, despite being told by doctors he would have to use a wheelchair.

SWITZERLAND

Switzerland set a record in 2006 when they became the first side in FIFA World Cup finals history to depart the tournament without conceding a goal. It sums up the country's football history: despite three FIFA World Cup quarter-final appearances (in 1934, 1938 and 1954 – the latter as tournament hosts) and reaching the second round in 2006, 2014, 2018 and 2022, Switzerland have failed to establish themselves on the international football stage. The country co-hosted EURO 2008 but crashed out in the group stage. Since then the Swiss have reached four World Cups (including Qatar 2022) and three EUROs, losing on penalties to England at EURO 2024 in the quarter-finals.





CLEAN SHEET WIPE-OUT

The Swiss national team made history in 2006 by becoming the first – and to date only – team to exit the FIFA World Cup without conceding a single goal in regulation time. However, in the shoot-out defeat to Ukraine in the second round, following a goalless 120 minutes, they failed to score a single penalty and lost 3-0. Despite being beaten three times in the shoot-out, goalkeeper **Pascal Zuberbuhler**'s performances in Germany earned him a Swiss record for consecutive clean sheets at an international tournament.

DERDIYOK AT THE DOZEN

Nineteen-year-old striker **Eren Derdiyok** scored with his very first kick of the ball in international football after coming on as a substitute against England at Wembley in a February 2009 friendly that the hosts won 2-1. He scored three of Switzerland's goals in a thrilling 5-3 friendly victory over Germany in May 2012 – making him the first player to score a hat-trick against the Germans since England's Michael Owen almost 11 years earlier. He was playing his club football at the time for German side Hoffenheim – and all three of his goals were set up by another Bundesliga-based player, Bayer Leverkusen's Tranquillo Barnetta.

TOP SCORERS

1	Alexander Frei	42
2	Max Abegglen	34
=	Kubilay Turkyilmaz	34
4	Xherdan Shaqiri	32
5	Andre Abegglen	29
6	Jacques Fatton	28
7	Adrian Knup	26
8	Haris Seferovic	25
9	Josef Hugi	22
=	Charles Antenen	22

LLAMA FARMER FREI-ING HIGH

After being compared to a llama by an angry Swiss sports press for spitting at Steven Gerrard at UEFA Euro 2004, **Alexander Frei**, Switzerland's all-time top scorer, adopted a llama at Basel zoo as part of his apology to the nation. Frei appeared to abandon all hope of adding to his record Swiss goal tally of 42 in 84 games when he announced his retirement from international football in April 2011, blaming abuse from his own fans during recent matches. These included a goalless draw against minnows Malta, when both Frei and team-mate Gokhan Inler missed penalties. Frei was joined in international retirement by strike partner Marco Streller, who had scored 12 goals in 37 games.

CHAMPION CHAPPI

Stephane "Chappi" Chapuisat – the third man to make 100 appearances for Switzerland – was the first Swiss player to win a UEFA Champions League medal when he led the line for Borussia Dortmund in their 3-1 victory over Juventus in 1997. But his most significant contribution in the final was to make way for Lars Ricken, whose goal with his first touch put the game beyond Juventus. Stephane's father, Pierre-Albert Chapuisat, was also a successful Swiss international – earning 34 caps for the national side in the 1970s and 1980s – but he failed to reach the heights of Stephane, who would later add both the Club World Cup and the Swiss super league (while playing for Grasshoppers) to his winners' medal collection.



YAK ATTACK

Brothers Murat and **Hakan Yakin** were both born in the Swiss city of Basel to Turkish parents and both opted to play for the country of their birth. Midfielder Murat, almost three years older than his brother, hit four goals and won 49 caps between 1994 and 2004, while Hakan – who played slightly further forward – made his international debut in 2000 and bowed out 11 years later. Hakan scored the opening goal of Switzerland's 2008 UEFA European Championship first-round 2-1 defeat to Turkey – in rain-sodden conditions and despite the ball sticking in the mud – but declined to celebrate. He ended his international career with 20 goals from 87 appearances.

TOP CAPS

	Player	Caps
1	Granit Xhaka	131
2	Xherdan Shaqiri	125
3	Ricardo Rodriquez	122
4	Heinz Hermann	118
5	Alain Geiger	110
6	Stephan Lichtsteiner	108
7	Stephane Chapuisat	103
8	Yann Sommer	94
=	Johann Vogel	94
10	Haris Seferovic	93

SEF ESTEEM

Switzerland not only set their 2014 FIFA World Cup campaign off to a dramatic and victorious beginning with a 2-1 triumph over Ecuador in Brasilia. They did so thanks to a strike three minutes into stoppage-time by substitute striker Haris Seferovic. This new mark for the latest winning goal recorded in the group stages of a FIFA World Cup lasted all of seven days – when Portugal equalized in the fifth minute of added time against the USA.

SHAQIRI SHAQIRI

Twenty-two-year-old **Xerdan Shaqiri** scored the 50th hat-trick in FIFA World Cup finals history during Switzerland's 3-0 triumph over Honduras in Manaus, in the first round of the 2014 tournament. The then-Bayern Munich playmaker was the second Swiss footballer to hit a FIFA World Cup treble, the previous one being Josef Hugi in their 7-5 defeat to Austria in the 1954 quarter-finals. Hugi remains the last Swiss scorer in the knock-out stages of a FIFA World Cup – since then they have lost 3-0 to Spain in 1994, on penalties following a second-round goalless draw with Ukraine in 2006 and 1-0 after extra time against Argentina eight years later.



THE ORIGINAL BOLT

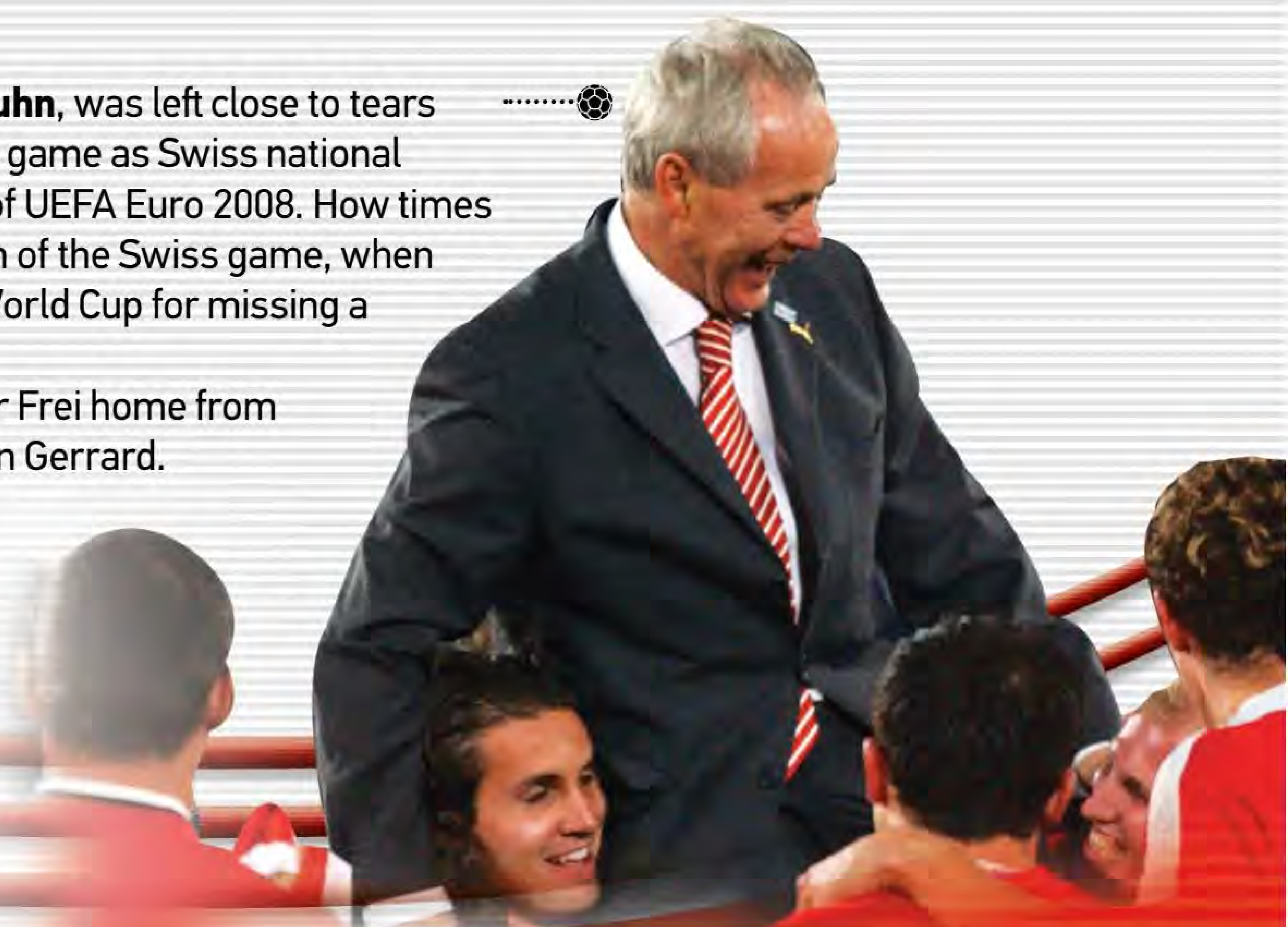
Karl Rappan did so much for Swiss football – including founding its first national football fan club – that it is often forgotten that he was Austrian. After a moderately successful career as a player and coach in Austria, Rappan achieved lasting fame as an innovative manager in Switzerland, leading the national side in the 1938 and 1954 FIFA World Cups, as well as securing league titles and cups as manager of Grasshopper Club, FC Servette and FC Zurich. He developed a flexible tactical system – which allowed players to switch positions depending on the situation and putting greater pressure on their opponents. This revolutionary new idea became known as the "Swiss bolt" and helped the unfancied hosts defeat Italy on the way to the quarter-finals of the 1954 FIFA World Cup, before losing out to Rappan's home country, Austria. An early advocate of a European league, Rappan eventually settled for the simpler knockout tournament, the Intertoto Cup, which he helped devise and launch in 1961. Rappan was, until Kobi Kuhn, Switzerland's longest-serving and statistically most successful manager, with 29 victories in 77 games in charge.

'MERCI KOBI'

Former Swiss international player and manager, **Jakob 'Kobi' Kuhn**, was left close to tears as his players unfurled a "thank you" banner at the end of his final game as Swiss national manager – the 2-0 victory over Portugal in the final group game of UEFA Euro 2008. How times have changed for Kuhn: while now a much-loved elder statesmen of the Swiss game, when he was just 22 years old, he was sent home from the 1966 FIFA World Cup for missing a curfew. He was then banned from the national side for a year.

The shoe was on the other foot when Kuhn had to send Alexander Frei home from UEFA Euro 2004 after the centre-forward spat at England's Steven Gerrard.

Kuhn spent most of his playing career, where he was described as playing "with honey in his boots", with FC Zurich, winning six league titles and five Swiss Cups. He played 63 times for the national side, scoring five goals. He then worked his way up through the ranks of the Swiss national team, leading first the Under-18s, then the Under-21s and finally the senior national team. He retired, aged 64, with a record of 32 victories, 18 draws and 23 defeats in 73 matches as Swiss coach.



TURKEY

Galatasaray's penalty shoot-out success over Arsenal in the 2000 UEFA Cup final signalled a change in fortune for Turkish football. Prior to that night in Copenhagen, Turkey had qualified for the FIFA World Cup only twice (in 1950, when they withdrew, and 1954), and had consistently underachieved on the world stage. Since 2000, however, Turkish fans have had plenty to cheer about, including a third-place finish at the 2002 FIFA World Cup, a semi-final appearance at EURO 2008 and a run to the quarter-finals of EURO 2024.



GUESS WHO'S BACK?

Rustu Recber doesn't know the meaning of the word "quit". Less than a year after retiring from international football after UEFA Euro 2008, Turkey's most-capped player came out of retirement to join the national team once more in the qualifying campaign for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. This was not his first international comeback – for UEFA Euro 2008, Rustu had been relegated to the bench, but played in the quarter-final against Croatia after first-choice keeper Volkan Demirel was sent off in the final group game. Rustu was the hero of the penalty shoot-out, saving from Mladen Petric to send Turkey through to their first-ever UEFA European Championship semi-final, in which they lost to Germany. Back in 1993, Rustu came back from an even more devastating set-back after he was seriously injured in a car crash that resulted in the death of a friend. The accident also scuppered a potential move to Besiktas, although he went on to star for Fenerbahce, winning five Turkish league titles in 12 years with them. With his distinctive pony-tail and charcoal-black war paint, Rustu has always stood out, but perhaps never more so than as a star performer in Turkey's third-place performance at the 2002 FIFA World Cup finals. He was elected into the Team of the Tournament and was named FIFA's Goalkeeper of the Year.



SPOREL SPORTS

Zeki Riza Sporel scored Turkey's first goal in international football, against Romania on 26 October 1923. He actually hit a brace that day in a 2-2 draw, the first of 16 games for Turkey in which he hit 15 goals. Turkey's captain for their first international was his older brother Hasan Kamil Sporel.

OLD GOLD

The last FIFA World Cup "golden goal" was scored by Turkey substitute **Ilhan Mansiz**, in the 94th minute of their 2002 quarter-final against Senegal – giving his side a 1-0 win on their way to finishing third overall. The "golden goal" rule was abandoned ahead of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, which went back to two guaranteed 15-minute periods of extra-time if a knockout fixture ended level after 90 minutes.

QUICK OFF THE MARK

Hakan Sukur scored the fastest-ever FIFA World Cup finals goal – taking only 11 seconds to score Turkey's first goal in their third-place play-off match against South Korea at the 2002 FIFA World Cup. Turkey went on to win the game 3-2 to claim third place, their finest-ever performance in the competition. His total of 51 goals (in 112 games) is more than double his nearest competitor in the national team ranking. His first goal came in only his second appearance, as Turkey beat Denmark 2-1 on 8 April 1992. He went on to score four goals in a single game twice – in the 6-4 win over Wales on 20 August 1997 and in the 5-0 crushing of Moldova on 11 October 2006.



TWIN TURKS

Hamit Altintop (right) was born 10 minutes before identical twin brother **Halil** (left) – and he has been just about leading the way throughout their parallel professional footballing careers since their birth in the city of Gelsenkirchen, Germany, on 8 December 1982. Both began playing for German amateur side Wattenscheid, before defender-cum-midfielder Hamit signed for FC Schalke 04 in the summer of 2006 and striker Halil followed suit shortly afterwards. Hamit would stay just a season there, though, before being bought by Bayern Munich. Both helped Turkey reach the semi-finals of the 2008 UEFA European Championship – losing to adopted homeland Germany – though only Hamit was voted among UEFA's 23 best players of the tournament.



TAKE FAT

Having coached Galatasaray to their UEFA Cup triumph in 2000, **Fatih Terim** led Turkey in their amazing run to the 2008 UEFA European Championship semi-finals. Defeat to Portugal in the opening game left the Turks with an uphill task, but stunning successive comebacks against Switzerland and the Czech Republic took them through to the quarter-finals. A 119th-minute goal seemed to have clinched the tie for Croatia, but, as the Croatian players celebrated, "Emperor" Fatih urged his players to get up, pick the ball out of the net and fight on to the very end. They did just that, and Semih Senturk's improbable equalizer took the match to penalties. The semi-final against Germany provided yet another rollercoaster ride, but this time there was no answer to the Germans' last-minute winner. When Fatih said "there is something special about this team" few could disagree. Terim followed this up with a third spell managing Galatasaray, before returning to international duty in August 2013 for a third stint in charge of Turkey. He won eight games and lost one before stepping aside to become the national team director. His tally as Turkey coach totalled 101 matches, comprising 51 wins, 26 draws and 24 defeats.



TOP SCORERS

1	Hakan Sukur	51
2	Burak Yilmaz	31
3	Tuncay Sanli	22
4	Lefter Kucukandonyadis	21
=	Cenk Tosun	21
6	Nihat Kahveci	19
=	Metin Oktay	19
=	Cemil Turan	19
=	Hakan Calhanoglu	19
10	Arda Turan	17
11	Zeki Riza Sporel	15

TOP CAPS

1	Rustu Recber	120
2	Hakan Sukur	112
3	Bulent Korkmaz	102
4	Emre Belozoglu	101
5	Arda Turan	100
6	Tugay Kerimoglu	94
7	Hakan CalhanoglU	92
8	Alpay Ozalan	90
9	Hamit Altintop	82
10	Mehmet Topal	81

500 MILESTONE

Turkey played their 500th match in international football on 14 November 2012, a friendly that ended in a 1-1 draw against Denmark. The game, played at Istanbul's Turk Telekom Arena, was preceded by pop star Hadise's performance and appearances by Turkish football legends. Turkey's first international match was also a draw in Istanbul: 2-2 against Romania on 26 October 1923.

WORK HARD, PLAY ARDA

Wing wizard **Arda Turan** has survived cardiac arrhythmia, swine flu and a car crash to emerge as one of Turkish football's leading lights. His international achievements include key goals at the 2008 UEFA European Championship, the first a stoppage-time winner against Switzerland, then Turkey's late opener when overturning a two-goal deficit against the Czech Republic in a first-round qualification decider. After leaving boyhood club Galatasaray for Spain's Atletico Madrid in 2011, he helped the club to glory in the UEFA Europa League and UEFA Super Cup in 2013 and La Liga in 2014, as well as the 2013–14 UEFA Champions League final, though he missed that match through injury, before moving to rivals Barcelona. He mixes in prestigious circles – guests at his June 2013 wedding to TV presenter Sinem Kobal included Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.



UKRAINE

Ukraine has been a stronghold of football in Eastern Europe for many years. A steady flow of talent from Ukrainian clubs with a rich European pedigree, such as Dynamo Kiev, provided the Soviet national team with many standout players in the years before independence. Since separating from the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has become a force in its own right, qualifying for the FIFA World Cup for the first time in 2006, reaching the quarter-finals, and Euro 2016 and 2020, having co-hosted Euro 2012. They missed out on Qatar 2022, beaten 1-0 in the play-offs by Wales, but reached EURO 2024.



DEVASTATING DEVIC

Ukraine enjoyed their biggest win on 6 September 2013 thrashing San Marino 9-0 in a FIFA World Cup qualifier – then rubbed salt into the wounds by winning 8-0 away to the same opposition the following month, on 25 October 2013. There were eight different scorers in the first game, with the opening goal struck by striker Marko Devic – and he then went on to hit a hat-trick in the rematch. Devic was actually born in Belgrade and brought up in Serbia but transferred to Ukrainian club Volyn Lutsk in 2005 and switched nationalities three years later.

ROCKET MAN

Andriy Shevchenko beat team-mate **Anatoliy Tymoshchuk** to become the first Ukrainian footballer to reach a century of international appearances, but the defensive midfielder later overtook the striker to become the country's most-capped player with 144 appearances. He also enjoyed the rare honour of seeing his name in space, when Ukrainian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko launched into orbit wearing a Zenit St Petersburg shirt with "Tymoshchuk" on the back in 2007. After leaving Zenit in 2009 for Bayern Munich, he won the 2013 UEFA Champions League with the German club before announcing his return to his previous St Petersburg side.



HARD START

With the newly independent Ukraine unable to register with FIFA in time for the qualifying rounds for the 1994 FIFA World Cup, many of their stars opted to play for Russia and went to the finals in the United States representing that country. Andrei Kanchelskis, Viktor Onopko, Sergei Yuran and Oleg Salenko could all have played for the new Ukraine side, but decided not to. Ukraine then failed to qualify for an international tournament until the **2006 FIFA World Cup** in Germany, where they lost 3-0 in the quarter-finals to eventual winners Italy.

YURI-KA MOMENT

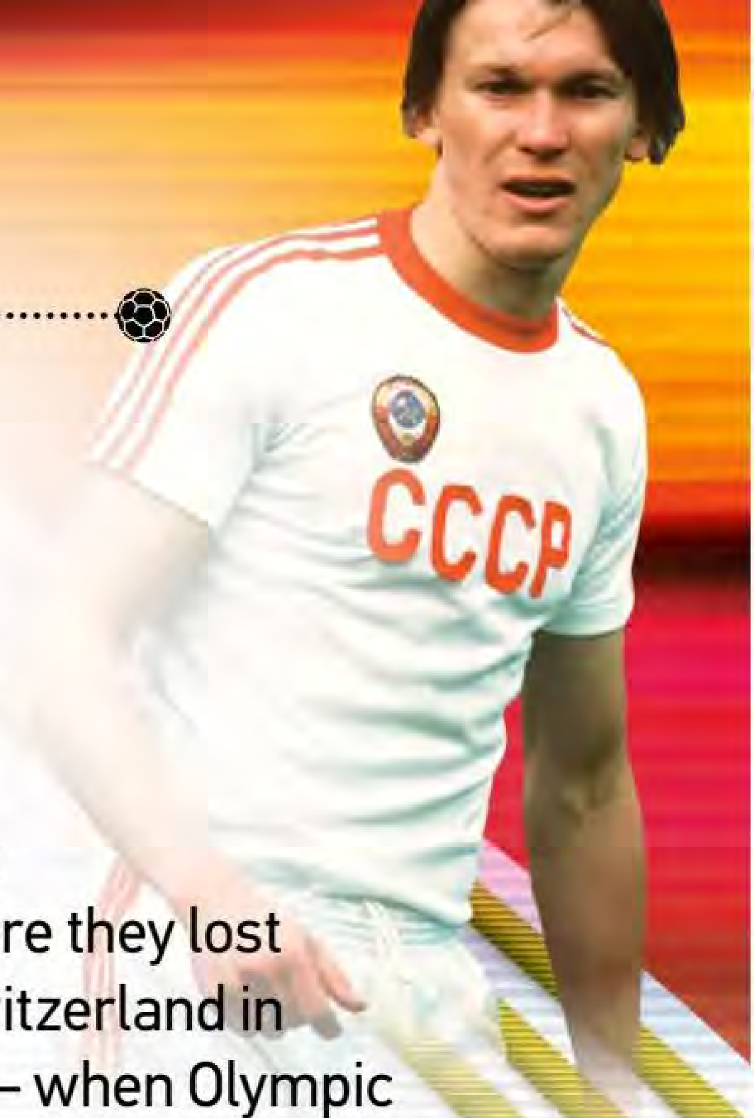
Denys Harmash and Dmytro Korkishko scored the goals against England that gave Ukraine their first major international footballing title, in the final of the 2009 UEFA Under-19 European Championship. The coach was Yuri Kalitvintsev, later assistant to Oleg Blokhin with the senior international side.

SUPER SHEVA

In 2004, **Andriy Shevchenko** became the third Ukrainian to win the Ballon D'Or. The first to do so, in 1975, was his 2006 FIFA World Cup coach Oleg Blokhin (second was Igor Belanov in 1986), but he was the first to win the award since Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union. Born on 29 September 1976, Shevchenko was a promising boxer as a youngster, before deciding to focus on football full-time. He has won trophies at every club he's played for, including five titles in a row with Dynamo Kiev, the Serie A and the Champions League with AC Milan, and even two cups in his "disappointing" time at Chelsea. Shevchenko is Ukraine's second most-capped player and leading goalscorer, with 48 goals in 111 games. This includes two at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, where he captained his country in their first-ever major finals appearance, and a double to secure a 2-1 comeback win over Sweden in Ukraine's first match co-hosting the 2012 UEFA European Championship.



LEADING FROM THE FRONT



Oleg Blokhin, Ukraine's coach on their first appearance at a major tournament finals, made his name as a striker with Dynamo Kiev. Born on 5 November 1952, when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, Blokhin scored a record 211 goals in another record 432 appearances in the USSR national league. He also holds the goals and caps records for the USSR, with 42 in 112 games. He led Kiev to two victory in the European Cup-Winners' Cup in 1975 and 1986, scoring in both finals, and was named the 1975 European Footballer of the Year. Always an over-achiever, Blokhin managed Ukraine to the finals of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, where they lost out to eventual winners Italy 3-0 in the quarter-finals after knocking out Switzerland in the second round – also on penalties. Blokhin was renowned for his speed – when Olympic gold medallist Valeriy Borzov trained the Kiev squad in the 1970s, Blokhin recorded a 100 metres time of 11 seconds, just 0.46 seconds slower than Borzov's own 1972 medal-winning run. Blokhin quit as Ukraine manager in December 2007, but returned to the job in April 2011. Ukraine's manager between 2012 and 2016 was former USSR international defender Mykhaylo Fomenko, whose 24 caps for the ex-Soviet Union included reaching the final of the 1972 UEFA European Championship and winning bronze at the Montreal 1976 Olympic Games. He was replaced by Andriy Shevchenko following UEFA Euro 2016.

REBROV REBORN

Serhiy Rebrov, who retired in 2009, was Andriy Shevchenko's dynamic strike partner for both club and country. The forward pair starred for Dynamo Kiev in the late 1990s before making big-money moves across Europe. Like Shevchenko at Chelsea, Rebrov struggled in London, first at Tottenham Hotspur and then at West Ham United. But after returning to Ukraine in 2005, he earned a late-career recall to the international team – and scored a memorable long-range strike against Saudi Arabia at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Having dropped back into midfield, he then crossed the border and helped outsiders Rubin Kazan win their first Russian league title in 2008. But Rebrov, a keen amateur radio 'ham', remains the Ukrainian Premier League's all-time leading scorer, with 125 goals in 268 games.

TOP SCORERS

1	Andriy Shevchenko	48
2	Andriy Yarmolenko	46
3	Yevhen Konoplyanka	21
4	Roman Yaremchuk	15
5	Serhiy Rebrov	15
6	Viktor Tsyhankov	13
=	Oleh Husyev	13
8	Serhiy Nazarenko	12
9	Yevhen Seleznyov	11
10	Artem Dovbyk	10
11	Andriy Husin	9
=	Andriy Vorobey	9

PY IN THE SKY

Goalkeeper **Andriy Pyatov** set a national record by going 752 minutes without conceding a goal for his country, between March 2013 and November 2013. The previous best had been Oleksandr Shovkovskiy's 728 minutes. Pyatov's resistance was finally ended by Mamadou Sakho's opener in a 3-0 play-off defeat that took France instead of Ukraine to the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

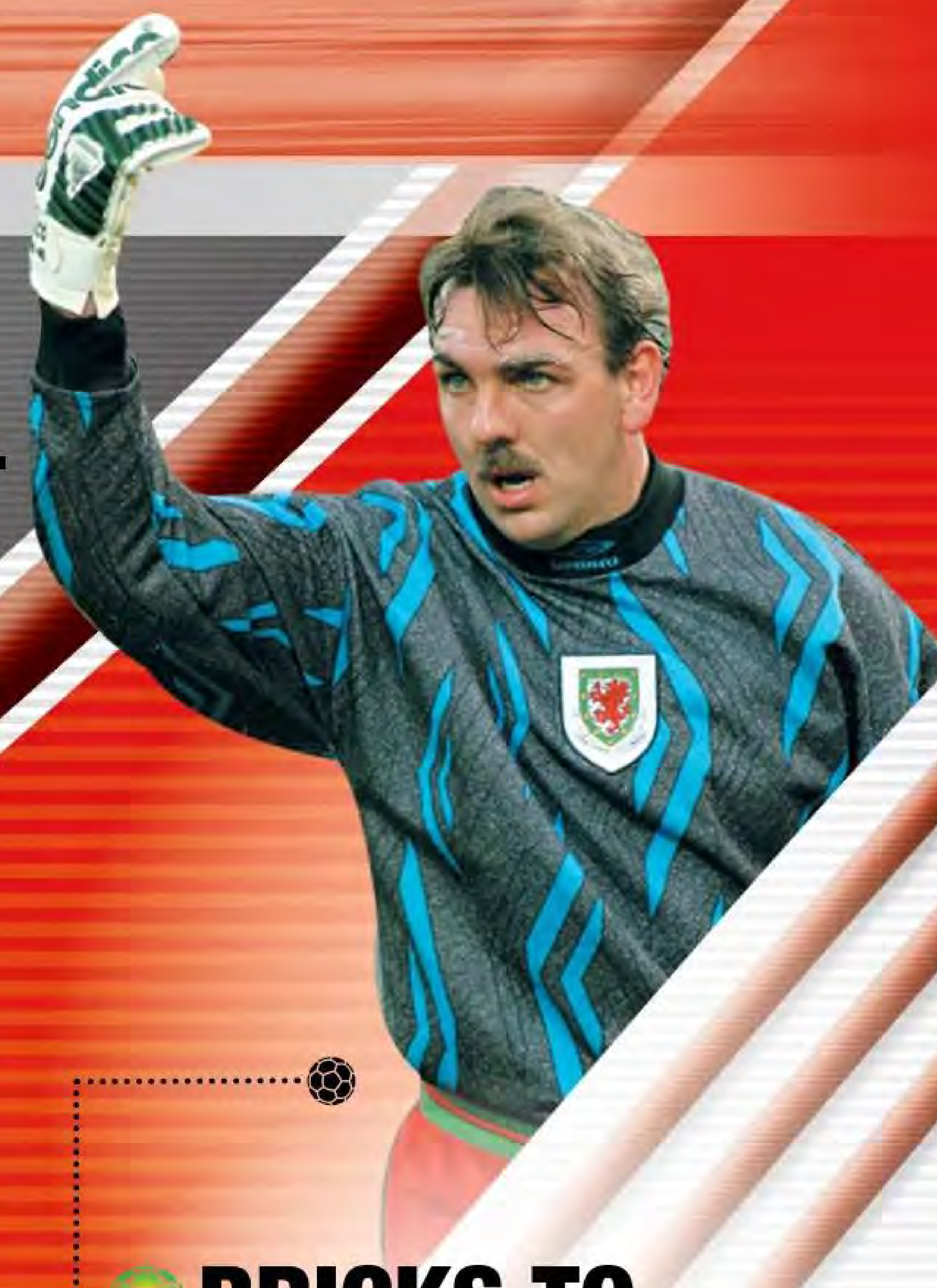


TOP CAPS

1	Anatoliy Tymoshchuk	144
2	Andriy Yarmolenko	124
3	Andriy Shevchenko	111
4	Andriy Pyatov	102
5	Ruslan Rotan	100
6	Oleh Husyev	98
7	Oleksandr Shovkovskiy	92
8	Yevhen Konoplyanka	87
9	Taras Stepanenko	86
10	Serhiy Rebrov	75

WALES

Historically, Wales have struggled to impose themselves on the world of international football, despite producing a number of hugely talented players. However, their run to the semi-finals at the 2016 European Championships – their first major finals since 1958 – helped catapult the team towards the pinnacle of European football. The Dragons missed out on the 2018 World Cup, but they bounced back at Euro 2020 to reach the last 16 and then beat Ukraine to reach Qatar 2022.





GOOD ON RAMSEY

Arsenal midfielder **Aaron Ramsey** became Wales's youngest captain when appointed to the role in March 2011 by new manager Gary Speed. Ramsey was 20 years 90 days old when he led the side out for the first time at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium in a 2012 UEFA European Championship qualifier that ended in a 2-0 win for England. The record had previously been held by centre-back Mike England, who was 22 years 135 days old when skipper against Northern Ireland in April 1964. Ramsey had not long returned to full fitness after a potentially career-threatening broken leg suffered while playing for Arsenal against Stoke City in February 2010.

BRICKS TO BRILLIANCE

Goalkeeper **Neville Southall** made the first of his 92 appearances for Wales in a 3-2 win over Northern Ireland on 27 May 1982. The former hod-carrier and bin man kept 34 clean sheets in 15 years playing for Wales and won the English Football Writers' Player of the Year in 1985 thanks to his performances alongside Welsh captain Kevin Ratcliffe at Everton. In his final match for Wales, on 20 August 1997, he was substituted halfway through a 6-4 defeat against Turkey in Istanbul.



WHERE'S OUR GOLDEN BOY?

One of the most skilful and successful players never to appear at the FIFA World Cup, **Ryan Giggs** somehow missed 18 consecutive friendlies for Wales. He made his Manchester United debut in 1990 and appeared in his 1,000th competitive match in a 2-1 UEFA Champions League defeat to Real Madrid. His tally by then included 932 club matches, 64 for Wales and four for Great Britain at the London 2012 Summer Olympics. Giggs finally hung up his boots aged 40 at the end of the 2013-14 season, the last four games of which he had spent as Manchester United's caretaker-manager following the dismissal of David Moyes. He made the announcement as the club revealed he would become assistant-manager to incoming boss Louis Van Gaal.

RUSH FOR GOAL

Ian Rush is Wales's leading goalscorer, with 28 goals in 73 games. His first came in a 3-0 win over Northern Ireland on 27 May 1982; he scored the 28th and final goal in a 2-1 win over Estonia in Tallinn in 1994.



CAUGHT ON CAMERA

Pioneer movie-makers Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon captured Wales playing Ireland in March 1906, making it the first filmed international football match.

TOP CAPS

1	Gareth Bale	111
2	Chris Gunter	109
=	Wayne Hennessey	109
4	Neville Southall	92
5	Ben Davies	88
6	Aaron Ramsey	86
=	Ashley Williams	86
8	Gary Speed	85
9	Craig Bellamy	78
10	Joe Ledley	77



TOP SCORERS

1	Gareth Bale	41
2	Ian Rush	28
3	Ivor Allchurch	23
=	Trevor Ford	23
5	Dean Saunders	22
6	Aaron Ramsey	21
7	Craig Bellamy	19
8	Robert Earnshaw	16
=	Mark Hughes	16
=	Cliff Jones	16

KANU BELIEVE IT?

The highlight of Wales' Euro 2016 campaign came in their 3-1 quarter-final win over highly fancied Belgium. Despite going a goal down, the Welsh rallied to score three unanswered goals, the second of which was a stunning turn and shot from striker Hal Robson-Kanu. The goal was a great advertisement – without a club during the tournament, Robson-Kanu was snapped up by West Bromwich Albion soon after.

ALL HAIL BALE

Wales's recent success was built largely on the back of their superstar forward. Blessed with dramatic bursts of acceleration and piledriving long-range shooting, wing wizard **Gareth Bale** cost Real Madrid £86 million to buy from England's Tottenham Hotspur in August 2013. Yet even that extravagant sum looked like money well spent when he scored the crucial extra-time goal that put Real Madrid ahead in the 2014 UEFA Champions League final against rivals Atletico Madrid. Real went on to win the match in Lisbon 4-1 after extra time. Bale had previously scored a stunning solo winner in that season's Spanish Cup final against Barcelona. Bale began his career at Southampton as a left-back, then blossomed as a dynamic left-winger at Spurs before flourishing as an all-round forward. He was named English football's player of the year in 2011 and 2013 – voted so by both the Premier League's footballers and the nation's journalists – thanks to dazzling performances and strikes for both Spurs and Wales. He became his country's all-time top scorer in major tournaments thanks to his three strikes at Euro 2016 as Wales upset the odds to reach the semi-final, where they were beaten by eventual winners Portugal. Bale's first two strikes, against Slovakia and England, came from free kicks, a feat that was last achieved in 1992 by Germany's Thomas Hassler.



HAT-TRICK HERO

Welsh striker Robert Earnshaw holds the remarkable record of having scored hat-tricks in all four divisions of English football, the FA Cup and the League Cup, as well as scoring three for the national team against Scotland on 18 February 2004.

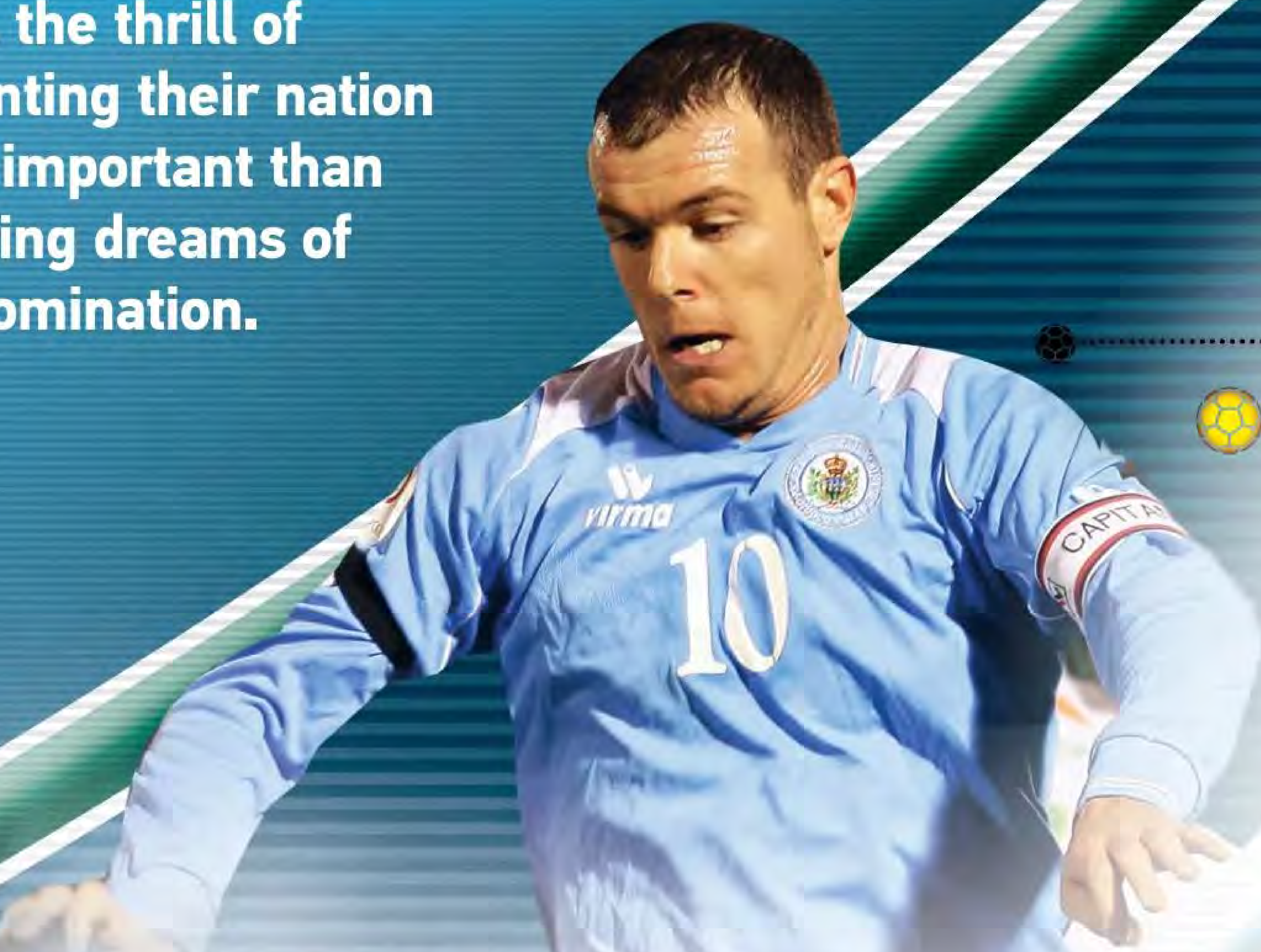
SHOCK LOSS OF A MODEL PROFESSIONAL

Welsh and world football were united in shock and grief at the sudden death of Wales manager **Gary Speed** in November 2011. Former Leeds United, Everton, Newcastle United and Bolton Wanderers midfielder Speed, the country's most-capped outfield player, was found at his home in Cheshire, England. The 42-year-old had been manager for 11 months, overseeing a series of encouraging performances that saw a rise in the world rankings from 116th to 48th and a prize for FIFA's "Best Movers" of 2011. An official memorial game was played in Cardiff in February 2012 between Wales and Costa Rica – the country against whom he had made his international debut in May 1990. Among the tributes paid to Speed was one from FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who called him "a model professional and a fantastic ambassador for the game". Former Wales centre-back Chris Coleman was appointed as Speed's successor.



OTHER TEAMS EUROPE

For the major European football powers, a qualifying campaign for one of the game's major international tournaments would not be the same without an awkward trip to one of the former Eastern Bloc countries or the chance of a goal-fest against the likes of San Marino or Luxembourg. For these countries' players, the thrill of representing their nation is more important than harbouring dreams of world domination.



SELVA SERVICE

San Marino, with a population of under 30,000, is the smallest country to be a member of UEFA. Striker **Andy Selva** is not only San Marino's top scorer with eight goals but for a long time was the country's only player to score twice – until midfielder Manuel Marani followed up his February 2007 goal against the Republic of Ireland with another, against Malta, in August 2012. Filippo Berardi has since eclipsed Marani with three goals.

MOSQUITO STINGS

Malta ended a 20-year wait for an away win in a competitive international when they shocked Armenia 1-0 in a 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifier in June 2013. Appropriately enough, the decisive strike came from veteran forward **Michael Mifsud** – his country's captain and all-time leading scorer, who made his international debut in February 2000 and made his name in Germany with Kaiserslautern and in England with Coventry City. Nicknamed "Mosquito", the 1.65m-tall player's international exploits include five goals in the 7-1 trouncing of Liechtenstein in March 2008 – including a hat-trick within the first 21 minutes. Before Armenia, the last time Malta won a FIFA World Cup or UEFA European Championship away qualifier had been a 1-0 success in Estonia in May 1993.

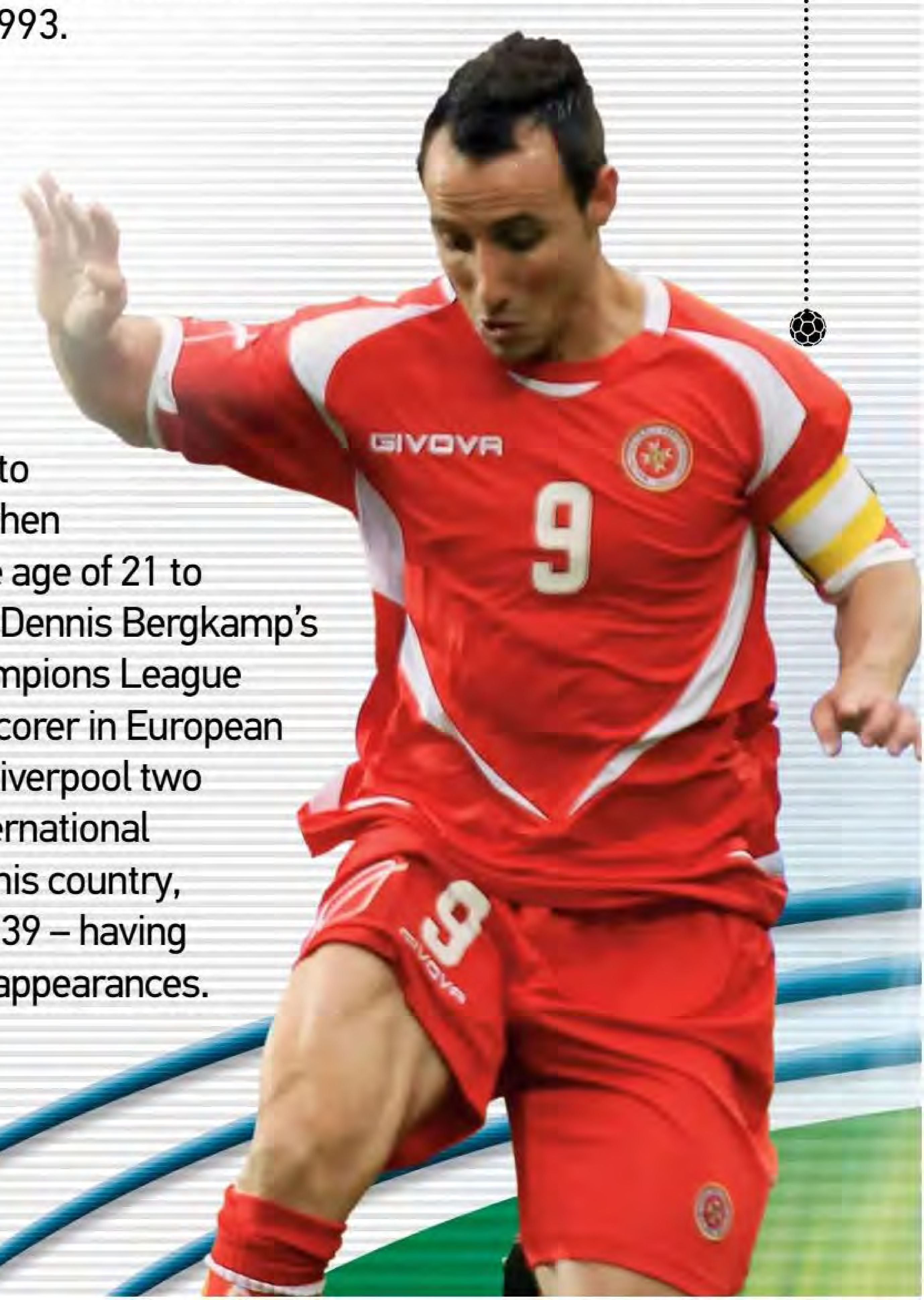
UNDERDOGS HAVE THEIR DAY

Slovenia were the only unseeded team to win a UEFA qualifying play-off for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, beating Russia on away goals. Slovenia lost 2-1 in Moscow, thanks to substitute Nejc Pecnik's crucial away goal late in the first leg and Ztlatko Dedic scored the only goal in Maribor to give Slovenia victory. With a population of two million and just 429 registered professional players, Slovenia was the smallest nation in the finals.



LIT'S A KNOCK-OUT

Perhaps it's not be too surprising that **Jari Litmanen** should have become a football star – both his parents played for the Lahti-based club Reipas while Litmanen's father Olavi also won five caps for the national team. But Jari's skills and achievements far outstripped them both – and, arguably, any other player the country has produced. It was fitting that Litmanen became the first Finnish player to get his hands on the UEFA European Cup – or Champions League trophy – when his Ajax Amsterdam side beat AC Milan in 1995. Litmanen had left Finland at the age of 21 to make his name and mark with the legendary Dutch club Ajax, inheriting the great Dennis Bergkamp's support-striker role – and number 10 shirt. Litmanen scored in the 1996 UEFA Champions League final, though Ajax lost on penalties to Juventus. He remains the Dutch club's record scorer in European competition, with 24 goals in 44 games. Litmanen joined Barcelona in 1999 and then Liverpool two years later, though his time in England was hampered by a wrist injury he suffered on international duty and he returned to Ajax in 2002. Despite a series of injuries, he remained dedicated to his country, captaining the side between 1996 and 2008, and was still playing and scoring in 2010, aged 39 – having recorded more international goals and games than any other Finn, scoring 32 times in 137 appearances.



GIVING IT UP

Lithuania and Estonia did not bother playing their final group game against each other in the 1934 FIFA World Cup qualifying competition. Sweden had already guaranteed themselves top spot, and the sole finals place available, by beating Lithuania 2-0 and Estonia 6-2.

BEYOND THE IRON CURTAIN

The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1990 led to 15 new footballing nations, though initially Russia played on at the 1992 UEFA European Championship as CIS, or the Commonwealth of Independent States – without the involvement of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In the coming years, UEFA and FIFA approved the creation of separate teams for Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikstan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Upheavals in the early 1990s would also fragment the former Yugoslavia into Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro and most recently Kosovo, while Czechoslovakia split into Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

YEAR AFFILIATED TO FIFA

Country	Year
Albania	1932
Andorra	1996
Austria	1905
Belarus	1992
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1996
Cyprus	1948
Estonia	1923
Faroe Islands	1988
Finland	1908
Georgia	1992
Gibraltar	2016
Greece	1927
Iceland	1947
Israel	1929
Kazakhstan	1994
Kosovo	2016
Latvia	1922
Liechtenstein	1974
Luxembourg	1910
Macedonia	1994
Malta	1959
Moldova	1994
Montenegro	2007
San Marino	1988
Slovenia	1992



REBORN BOURG

A long and painful wait finally ended for traditional whipping-boys Luxembourg when they beat Northern Ireland 3-2 in September 2013. It was the "Red Lions" first home win in a FIFA World Cup qualifier for 41 years, since overcoming Turkey 2-0 in October 1972. It was also five years to the day since their last FIFA World Cup qualifying victory, a 2-1 triumph in Switzerland in 2008. Luxembourg's goals came from Aurelien Joachim, Stefano Bensi and **Mathias Janisch**. The winning goal, with three minutes remaining, was the first of Janisch's international career.

THE FULL MONTY AND THE FULL MONTY

Estonia may have lost their June 2012 friendly against France 4-0, despite the presence of all-time top scorer **Andres Oper**, but they did make history that night, becoming the first country to play all 52 fellow UEFA nations. The 52nd addition to the UEFA family was Montenegro, who became a FIFA member in 2007, a year after competing as part of Serbia and Montenegro in the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Both Estonia and Montenegro came close to a major tournament in their own right by reaching the play-offs for the 2012 UEFA European Championship, but lost over two legs to the Republic of Ireland and the Czech Republic respectively. In 2013 Gibraltar became the 54th member of UEFA.

NEW TEAM ON THE BLOC

UEFA's most recent member, Kosovo played their first official competitive game in September 2016, kicking off their World Cup qualifying campaign with a hard-fought draw away to Finland. Their equalizing penalty in the 1-1 draw came from forward Valon Berisha, but he very nearly didn't make it on to the field for the game. Berisha was one of six Kosovar players who were only given clearance to play by FIFA on the day of the game – the others being Amir Rrahmani, Alban Meha, Herolind Shala, Milot Rashica and Samir Ujkani. The delay came as a result of these players having made appearances for other nations prior to their switch to Kosovo. Berisha had 19 caps for Norway, while the others had all previously appeared for Albania. Other players potentially eligible to declare for Kosovo included Xherdan Shaqiri and Granit Xhaka of Switzerland.

HIT AND SWISS

When defender Elsad Zverotic made his 44th appearance, he passed Simon Vukcevic to become Montenegro's most-capped international. He was born in Behane, in what is now Serbia, but played for Switzerland U-18s, where he also played his club football from 2004. Zverotic moved to Premier League side Fulham in 2013.





MORE SIND AGAINST

Austria's star player **Matthias Sindelar** refused to play for a new, merged national team when Germany annexed Austria in 1938. Sindelar, born in modern-day Czech Republic in February 1903, was the inspirational leader of Austria's so-called Wunderteam of the 1930s. He scored 27 goals in 43 games for Austria, who went 14 internationals unbeaten between April 1931 and December 1932, won the 1932 Central European International Cup and silver at the 1936 Olympics. During a special reunification match between the Austrian and German teams in Vienna in April 1938, Sindelar disobeyed orders and scored a spectacular solo goal. Austria went on to win 2-0 in a game which might have been expected to end in a diplomatic draw. Sindelar was mysteriously found dead from carbon monoxide poisoning in his Vienna apartment in January 1939.

THE GUD SON

Iceland striker **Eidur Gudjohnsen** made history on his international debut away to Estonia in April 1996, by coming on as a substitute for his own father, Arnor Gudjohnsen. Eidur was 17 at the time, his father 34 – though both were disappointed they did not get to play on the pitch at the same time. The Icelandic Football Association thought they would get a chance to do so in Iceland's next home game, but Eidur was ruled out by an ankle injury and the opportunity never arose again.



AD ENOUGH

Temuri Ketsbaia scored 17 times for Georgia, more than anyone other than 26-goal Shota Arveladze and joint-second with Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, and was also the first coach to lead a Cypriot side – Anorthosis Famagusta – into the UEFA Champions League before taking over as Georgia's national coach in 2009. Yet to many fans – those in England especially – he might be best remembered for his bizarre celebration after scoring a last-minute winner for Newcastle United against Bolton Wanderers in January 1998, when instead of looking pleased he flung off his shirt and furiously kicked out at pitchside advertising hoardings. After receiving the ball when the game kicked off again, he instantly booted it high into the crowd.

YURA STAR

Armenia equalled their biggest ever win with a 4-0 triumph away to Denmark in FIFA World Cup qualifying in June 2013. **Yura Movsisyan** opened the scoring after only 24 seconds, later added another goal and was applauded off even by the home fans when substituted with seven minutes remaining. The Spartak Moscow forward used to play club football in Denmark, for Randers. He had begun his football career in the USA, having moved there as a child with his Armenian family after being born in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku. Armenia's unexpected and emphatic victory over the Danes came just four days after an embarrassing 1-0 defeat to Malta, only their opponents' fifth ever victory in a competitive match.



REIM AND REASONING

Before being overtaken by Latvia's Vitalijs Astafjevs, the European record for most international appearances was held by another Baltic veteran – Estonian holding midfielder Martin Reim scored 14 goals in 157 games for his country between June 1992 and June 2009. Yet he could even have closed in on an unprecedented double-century of international appearances, had he not missed 40 games following a dispute with Latvia's Dutch manager Jelle Goes between 2004 and 2007. He retired from international football after matching the 150-cap record of Germany's Lothar Matthaus in February 2007, but was persuaded to return by new national boss Viggo Jensen. His 157th and final match, a testimonial played in his honour, came against Equatorial Guinea on 6 June 2009, a day that was also said to mark the centenary of football in Estonia.

VITAL VITALIJS

Midfielder Vitalijs Astafjevs put Latvia on the map when he became the most-capped European footballer of all time, with 167 appearances for his country – including three at the 2004 UEFA European Championship. He also scored 16 goals for Latvia. Astafjevs made his international debut in 1992, the year the Latvian football team was revived after independence following the break-up of the Soviet Union. He was still playing for his country at the age of 38 in November 2009, when his appearance in a friendly against Honduras saw him to overtake Estonian Martin Reim's record for most European caps.

MOST INTERNATIONAL APPEARANCES

Albania	Lorik Cana	93
Andorra	Ildefons Lima	137
Austria	Marko Arnautovic	118
Belarus	Alyaksandr Kulchy	102
Bosnia-Herz.	Eden Dzeko	136
Cyprus	Ioannis Okkas	103
Estonia	Konstantin Vassiljev	158
Faroe Islands	Frodi Benjaminsen	96
Finland	Jari Litmanen	137
Georgia	Guram Kashia	106
Iceland	Birkir Bjarnason	113
Israel	Yossi Benayoun	101
Kazakhstan	Samat Smakov	76
Latvia	Vitalijs Astafjevs	167
Liechtenstein	Peter Jehle	132
Lithuania	Saulius Mikoliunas	101
Luxembourg	Laurent Jans	106
N. Macedonia	Goran Pandev	122
Malta	Michael Mifsud	143
Moldova	Alexandru Epureanu	100
Montenegro	Fatos Beciraj	86
San Marino	Matteo Vitaioli	87
Slovenia	Bostjan Cesar	101

ED BOY

Edin Dzeko became Bosnia-Herzegovina's all-time leading scorer with a second-half hat-trick in an 8-1 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifier victory over Liechtenstein in September 2012. The goals not only took him past previous record-holder Elvir Bolic, but also ahead of Dzeko's international team-mate Zvejdan Misimovic whose brace earlier in the game had briefly put him in the lead. Midfielder Misimovic drew level again with Dzeko in the following game, scoring twice in a 4-1 win, before Dzeko's last-minute strike put him ahead again. Not bad for a forward sold by Bosnian club Zeljeznicar to the Czech Republic's FK Teplice for a cut-price €25,000 in 2005 – six years before English club Manchester City handed over €32 million to sign him from Germany's VfL Wolfsburg. Dzeko's off-field activities include a role as a UNICEF ambassador – and he donated almost €25,000 in 2012 towards the care of a 17-year-old Bosnian boy fighting bone marrow disease.

SUPER PAN

Macedonia celebrated 100 years of football in the country with a friendly against world champions Spain in August 2009 – and star striker **Goran Pandev** marked the occasion by becoming his country's all-time leading scorer. His first-half brace gave the hosts a 2-0 lead and although Spain came back to win 3-2, he replaced 16-goal Georgi Hristov at the top of Macedonia's scoring charts. Pandev has played the majority of his club career in Italy and helped Inter Milan win a treble of the UEFA Champions League, Serie A and the Coppa Italia in 2009-10. But his crowning moment came on 12 November 2020 when he scored the winner in a 1-0 EURO 2020 playoff final victory over Georgia that saw Macedonia qualify for their first-ever major tournament.





LAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

The 1938 FIFA World Cup went ahead with 15 instead of 16 teams after qualifiers Austria found themselves annexed by Germany – to the frustration of Latvia, who had finished runners-up in the Austrians' qualification group. Latvia was subsumed by the Soviet Union between 1940 and 1991, but qualified for their first major finals by beating Turkey in a play-off to reach the 2004 UEFA European Championship. Their team at that tournament featured all-time leading scorer Maris Verpakovskis, still playing for Latvia in 2013, and their most-capped player Vitalijs Astafjevs.



BASKET CASE

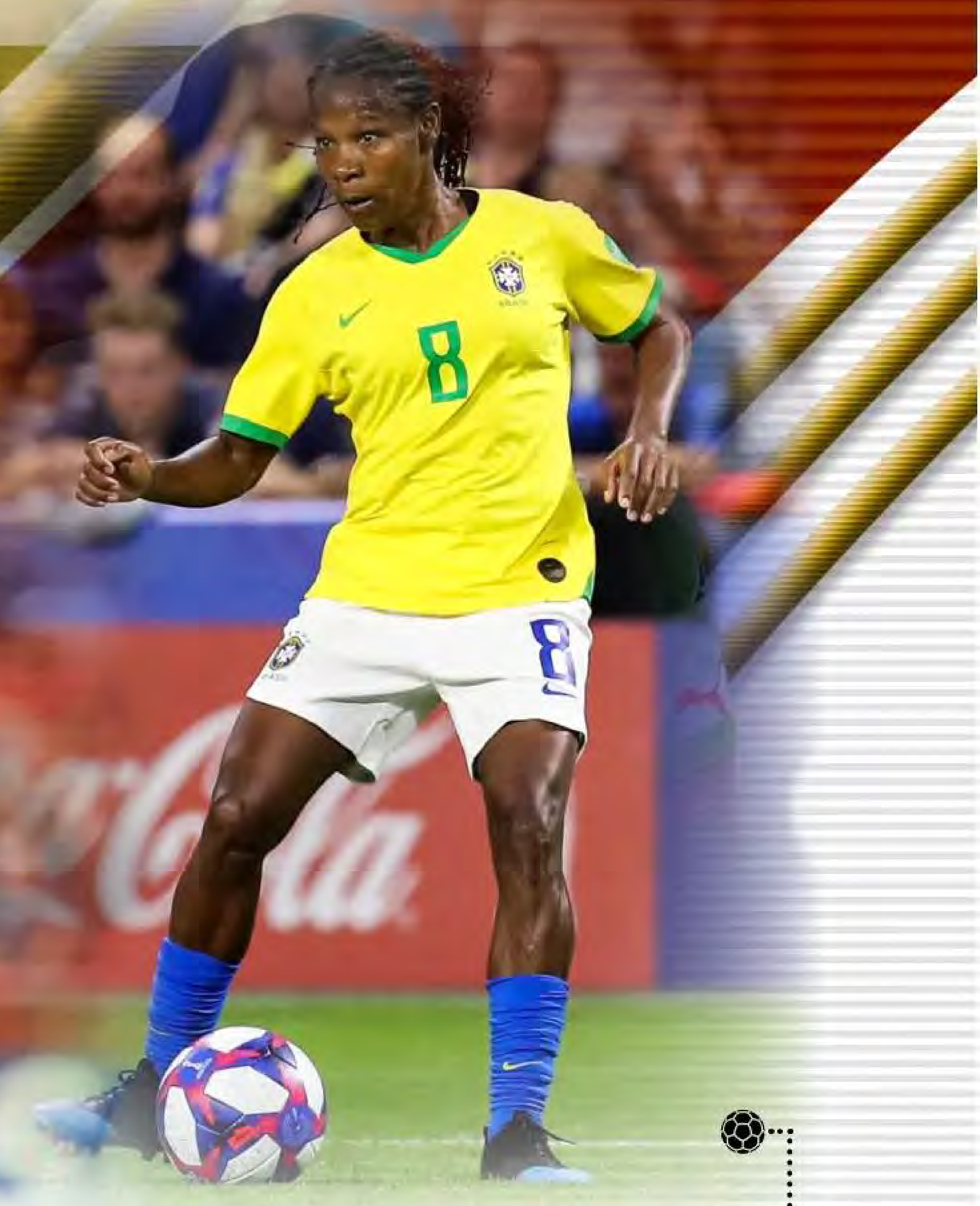
Captain **Rashad Sadygov** not only secured Azerbaijan's biggest win in their history when he scored the only goal against Turkey in a UEFA Euro 2012 qualifier in October 2010 – he was also delivering a blow against the country in which he was making his living. Having previously played for Turkish top-flight side Kayserispor, he had since moved on to rivals Eskisehirspor. Not every transfer has worked out well for Sadygov: he missed the transfer deadline when signing for Azeri side PFC Neftchi in 2006, so he decided to play basketball for a season to keep himself fit until allowed to resume football.

MOST INTERNATIONAL GOALS

Albania	Erjon Bogdani	18
Andorra	Ildefons Lima	11
Austria	Toni Polster	44
Belarus	Maksim Romashenko	20
Bosnia-Herz.	Edin Dzeko	66
Cyprus	Michalis Konstantinou	32
Estonia	Andres Oper	38
Faroe Islands	Klaemint Olsen	10
Finland	Teemu Pukki	42
Georgia	Shota Arveladze	26
Iceland	Gylfi Sigurdsson	27
Israel	Eran Zahavi	35
Kazakhstan	Baktiyar Zaynutdinov	14
Latvia	Maris Verpakovskis	29
Liechtenstein	Mario Frick	16
Lithuania	Tomas Danilevicius	19
Luxembourg	Gerson Rodrigues	21
N. Macedonia	Goran Pandev	38
Malta	Michael Mifsud	42
Moldova	Ion Nicolaescu	16
Montenegro	Stevan Jovetic	36
San Marino	Andy Selva	8
Slovenia	Zlatko Zahovic	35

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

Since the inaugural women's European Championships in 1984, the female game has gone from strength to strength, with the first-ever women's World Cup in 1991 propelling it onto a global stage. Stars such as Mia Hamm, Marta and Birgit Prinz have been inspiring generations ever since. Here are some of the teams and players who have taken women's football to new heights.





TOP FEMALE INTERNATIONAL GOALSCORERS

#	Player	Goals
1	Christine Sinclair	190
2	Abby Wambach	184
3	Mia Hamm	158
4	Maysa Jbarah	137
5	Carli Lloyd	134
6	Kristine Lilly	130
7	Birgit Prinz	128
8	Alex Morgan	123
9	Marta	119
10	Julie Fleeting	116
11	Patrizia Panico	110

FORMIDABLE FORMIGA

By 41 years and 98 days old, most players have long hung up their boots and instead have no choice but to enjoy the World Cup from the comfort of their sofas. Not so for Brazil midfielder **Formiga**, who became the oldest female player ever to represent her country at the World Cup in 2019, her seventh showing at the tournament.

O CANADA!

When the women's football tournament kicked off at the postponed 2020 Tokyo Olympics the majority of pundits backed reigning world champions the USA to take gold, and if not them then perhaps the high-scoring Dutch or even the resilient Swedes. Very few foresaw Canada going all the way, which is precisely what they did, dispatching Brazil, the USA and finally Sweden in the knockout stages en route to a maiden Olympic gold.

HUMM-DINGER

Prior to the 2019 installment, the 2015 World Cup witnessed a record amount of goals – 149 in total. Its fans were also treated to the fastest World Cup hat-trick in history courtesy of Switzerland's **Fabienne Humm**, who netted three times in the space of five minutes against Ecuador, helping to propel her team to a 10-1 victory.

THAI TAKEOUT

Never a team to be shy in front of goal, the USA have on three occasions finished as the top-scoring team at the World Cup. In 2019 half of their final total of 26 goals came in a 13-0 thumping of Thailand.

USUAL SUSPECTS

Only seven countries have qualified for all nine World Cups to date: USA, Germany, Japan, Brazil, Sweden, Norway and Nigeria.

WE MEET AGAIN

No two teams have met each other in the final of the women's European Championships more than Germany and Norway. On each of the four occasions Germany emerged triumphant, winning 4-1 in 1989, 3-1 in 1991 and 2005 and 1-0 in 2013.





A SHAW-FIRE BET

Not only did Jamaica stun the world of women's football by reaching their first World Cup in 2019, but they also got there with the help of the highest goal scorer in qualifying – forward **Khadija Shaw** netted 19 times to help the Reggae Girlz to their maiden tournament.



TOP FEMALE INTERNATIONAL APPEARANCES

1	Kristine Lilly	354
2	Christine Sinclair	331
3	Carli Lloyd	316
4	Christie Pearce	311
5	Mia Hamm	276
6	Julie Foudy	274
7	Abby Wambach	255
8	Joy Fawcett	241
9	Caroline Seger	240
10	Sheridan Spitse	235
11	Formiga	234

A FAMILIAR FACE

Nobody has played more World Cup matches than USA forward **Kristine Lilly**, who featured in 30 during a glittering career that saw her reach 354 caps, feature in five World Cups and score a total of 130 international goals, eight of them coming on the biggest stage.

EIGHT NOT OUT

Among the European teams who competed to qualify for the 2019 World Cup in France, only two emerged from their eight matches undefeated. England won seven and drew one, while Spain won all eight of their games to cruise to the finals. The former would go on to reach the semi-finals, while Spain were knocked out 2-1 by the USA in the Round of 16.

LAND OF THE RISING ONE

Only one country outside of North America and Europe has ever won the women's World Cup: Japan in 2011. To the surprise of most followers of the game, they defeated favourites USA 3-1 on penalties following a topsy-turvy 2-2 draw. The holders then reached the final again in 2015, but on that occasion they were hammered 5-2 by a vengeful USA.

HOTTEST TICKET IN TOWN

The 1995 women's World Cup still to this day boasts the largest attendance for any match. On a historic day for women's sport in general, 90,185 fans packed out the Rose Bowl in California to witness the USA beat China 5-4 on penalties in the final. No other female sporting event has drawn such a massive crowd.

DEUTSCHLAND UBER ALLES

When it comes to the European Championships, Germany are always the team to beat. Eight-times winners, they have played the most games at the Euros (40), boast the most wins (31), have netted more often than any other side (93) and chalked up the most goals in one tournament (21 in 2009). However, they did finally lose a final in 2022, with England defeating them 2-1 to win a maiden trophy.





NOT-SO-SUPER EAGLES
Qualifying for every women's World Cup to date is a record Nigeria are rightfully proud of. It's just a shame they don't ever make much of an impact when they finally get there. They are currently the holders of four unwanted records: most losses (19), most goals conceded (63), worst overall goal difference (-43) and most red cards (four). However, on a positive note, they are strong believers in giving youth a chance.

In 1999 Ifeanyi Chiejine became the youngest ever player to feature at a World Cup at the age of 16 years and 34 days old. They also boast the youngest ever skipper in Nkiru Okosieme, who captained Nigeria against Germany in 1991 at the age of 19 years and 261 days old.

DEMOLITION JOB
En route to winning their first-ever major trophy at Euro 2022, England inflicted the heaviest defeat at a women's European Championship, thrashing Norway (ranked 11th in the world at the time) 8-0 on a stunning night at Brighton's Amex Stadium. Goals from Georgia Stanway, Lauren Hemp, Ellen White (2), Beth Mead (3) and Alessio Russo secured England's place in the knockout stages with a game to spare. They would finish the tournament with a whopping 22 goals, 14 of them coming in the group stages, both of which are records.

ALL GOALS, NO GLORY
Out of nine World Cups to date, on only three occasions has the team who scored the most goals failed to go on and lift the trophy: China in 1999 (19 goals), the USA in 2011 (13 goals) and Germany in 2015 (20 goals).

MAKING UP THE NUMBERS
To date, a total of 11 countries have reached the World Cup only to fail to record a single victory: Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Republic of Ireland, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Panama, Scotland and Vietnam.

MOST WORLD CUP GAMES WON BY COUNTRY

1	United States	41
2	Germany	31
3	Sweden	29
4	Norway	25
5	Brazil	21
=	England	21
7	Japan	18
8	China	17
9	France	13
10	Canada	9

ANGRY AUSSIES
The Matildas are always a combative outfit, which may go some way to explaining why, with three dismissals to date, they are joint second with the USA for World Cup red cards (Nigeria lead the way with four). One of them came in record time too – forward Alicia Ferguson was sent to the showers in only the second minute of Australia's 3-1 group-stage defeat to China in 1999.

SPOT ON
No player in the women's game has a better record from the spot at World Cups than former midfielder Bettina Wiegmann. Across four tournaments (1991, 1995, 1999 and 2003) Wiegmann coolly dispatched a total of eight penalties in normal time (not shoot-outs) for Germany.



AN ELITE CLUB
The 2022 European Championships was the 13th edition of the tournament, and yet by winning the final, England became only the fifth different champion, joining Norway (twice winners), Sweden, Germany (eight-time champions) and the Netherlands on a short but illustrious list.





RETURN OF THE AZZURRI

After a 20-year absence, in 2019 Italy returned to the World Cup fold in style, beating Australia, one of the pre-tournament favourites, 2-1 thanks to a brace by Juventus striker Barbara Bonansea.

SHY IN COMING FORWARDS

To date no World Cup champions have scored fewer goals on their route to glory than Japan in 2011, when just 12 goals (and a tense penalty shoot-out in the final against the USA) were enough to secure the crown. Amazingly, at the same tournament Japan also conceded the most goals of any eventual champion, shipping six, including two in a 2-0 group-stage loss to England.

GERMANY'S LETHAL DUO

When it comes to finding the back of the net at the women's Euros, no two players have done it more than Inka Grings and Birgit Prinz of Germany: both forwards notched ten goals each during glittering international careers.

Starting with a bang, Grings netted four times at the 2005 Euros in England, including a brace in a semi-final win over Finland and one in a 3-1 final defeat of Norway. She went even better in Finland four years later, scoring six, two coming in a 6-2 final demolition of England. Yet it wasn't just on the European stage that Grings blossomed - she also has the distinction of being the youngest ever hat-trick scorer at a women's World Cup, a feat she achieved at the age of 20 years and 236 days in a 6-0 Group Stage battering of Mexico in 1999.

As for Birgit Prinz, her ten European goals were scored at five different tournaments from 1995 to 2009. Incredibly, she emerged from each tournament with a winners medal as Germany dominated the continent.

TOP FEMALE WORLD CUP GOALSCORERS

1	Marta	17
2	Birgit Prinz	14
=	Abby Wambach	14
4	Michelle Akers	12
5	Sun Wen	11
=	Cristiane	11
=	Bettina Wiegmann	11
8	Ann Kristin Aarønes	10
=	Heidi Mohr	10
=	Christine Sinclair	10
=	Carli Lloyd	10



HISTORY DOWN UNDER

The 2023 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand was an unforgettable footballing fiesta that served up a record 164 goals, numerous shocks and a maiden champion. After the group stages saw giants Canada, Brazil and Germany crashing out, the Round of 16 witnessed the demise of holders USA, who failed to reach at least the semi-finals of a World Cup for the first time after their spot-kick defeat to Sweden. Elsewhere, Australia fought their way to a first-ever semi-final, where they were beaten 3-1 by England, who reached their first World Cup final. However, it was Spain who would ultimately triumph. Recovering from a 4-0 thrashing by Japan in the group stages, Spain navigated a tricky route to the final before beating England 1-0 to clinch the crown.

SOUTH AMERICA

South America has a rich footballing history, with the very first FIFA World Cup finals taking place in Uruguay in 1930, while Brazil hosted the most recent FIFA World Cup to be held on the continent in 2014. It has also been home to some of the greatest ever teams. Brazil, the most successful team in FIFA World Cup history, have lifted the trophy five times, while rivals Argentina now boast three titles while Uruguay have two, the latter being the first winners. Argentina and Uruguay are hoping to team up with Chile and Paraguay to co-host the 2030 tournament.

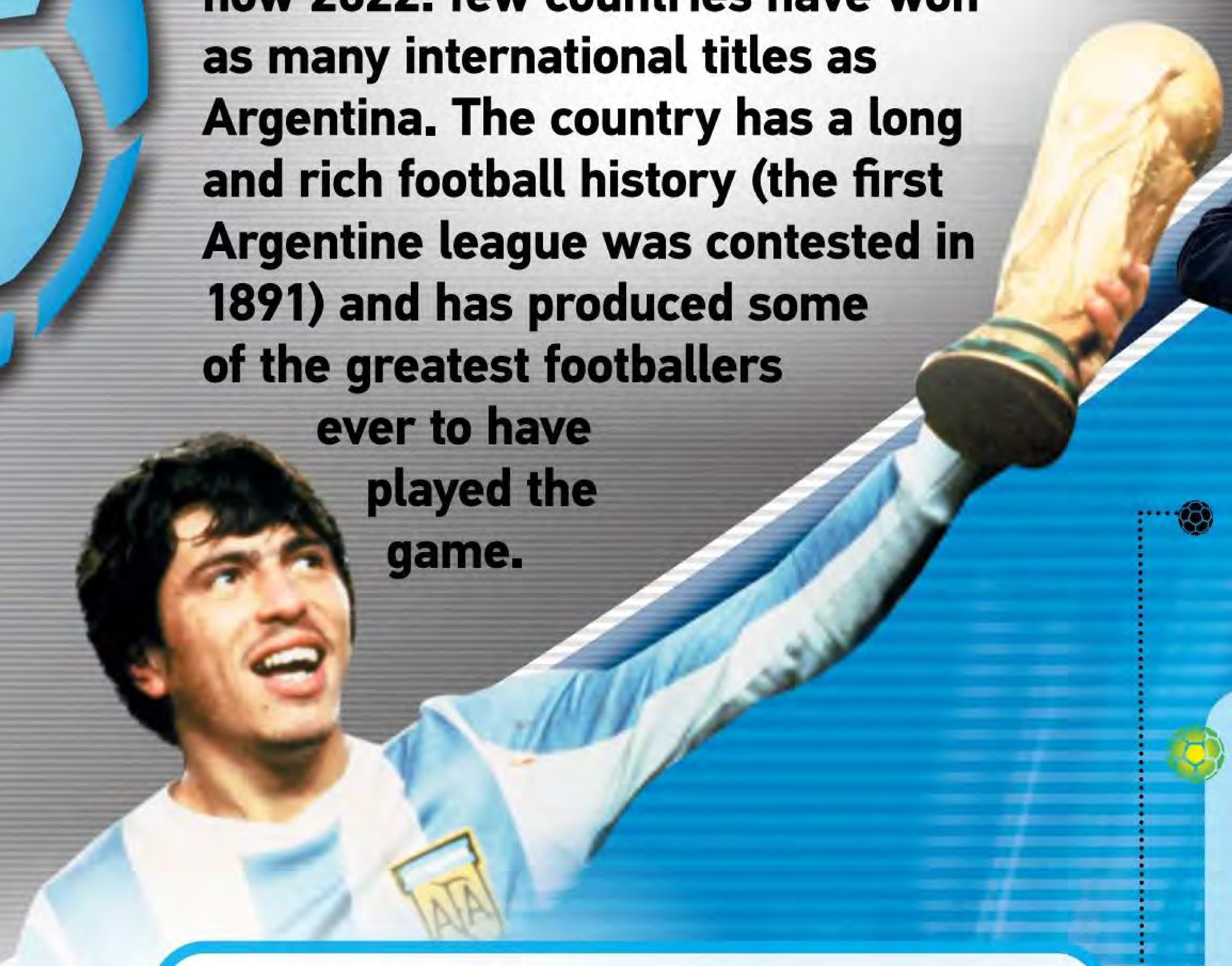


Brazilian fans cheers on the Selecao in Qatar, a campaign that would end in heartbreak.



ARGENTINA

Copa America champions on 15 occasions, FIFA Confederations Cup winners in 1992, Olympic gold medallists in 2004 and 2008 and, most treasured of all, FIFA World Cup winners in 1978, 1986 and now 2022: few countries have won as many international titles as Argentina. The country has a long and rich football history (the first Argentine league was contested in 1891) and has produced some of the greatest footballers ever to have played the game.





LONGEST-SERVING MANAGERS

Manager	Years
Guillermo Stabile	1939–60
Cesar Luis Menotti	1974–83
Carlos Bilardo	1983–90
Alfio Basile	1990–94 2006–08
Marcelo Bielsa	1998–2004
Jose Maria Minella	1964–68
Daniel Passarella	1994–98
Manuel Seoane	1934–37
Juan Jose Pizzuti	1969–72
Alejandro Sabella	2011–14
Lionel Scaloni	2018–

HAPPY AND SAB

Argentina's 2014 FIFA World Cup squad received a rapturous welcome home from thousands of fans and national president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner after their final loss to Germany. There had already been mass celebrations and relief across Argentina at qualifying for their first FIFA World Cup final since 1990. The 2014 coach was **Alejandro "Alex" Sabella**, who succeeded Sergio Batista in 2011. Sabella, who stepped down after the tournament, led the first Argentina side to win all of their first five games at a FIFA World Cup, before relying on the penalty saves of goalkeeper Sergio Romero in the semi-final. Sabella's two predecessors, Batista and Diego Maradona, were both FIFA World Cup winners as Argentina players in 1986 – two years after midfielder Sabella won the last of his eight caps.

FRINGE PLAYERS

Daniel Passarella was a demanding captain when he led his country to glory at the 1978 FIFA World Cup. He was the same as coach. After taking over the national side in 1994, he refused to pick anyone unless they had their hair cut short – and ordered striker Claudio Caniggia to get rid of his "girl's hair".

GONZALO'S HIGHS AND LOWS

Striker Gonzalo Higuain ended the longest scoring drought of his international career – 528 minutes and six matches – when he netted the only goal with an opportunist's strike against Belgium in the 2014 FIFA World Cup quarter-final. Higuain was born in Brest, France, where his ex-footballer father Jorge Higuain was playing, but left the country aged ten months. Higuain holds dual French-Argentina nationality, but took up Argentine citizenship in 2007. His goal against Belgium was his only one of the 2014 FIFA World Cup though he did think he had given Argentina the lead in the final against Germany, only for it to be ruled out for offside.



WORTH WAITING FOR

Argentina's national stadium, "El Monumental" in Buenos Aires, hosted its first game in 1938. But the original design was not completed until 20 years later – largely thanks to the £97,000 River Plate received for a transfer fee from Juventus for **Omar Sivori**. The stadium is a must-see stop on the itinerary of many global football tourists for the "Superclasico" derby between hosts River Plate and cross-city rivals Boca Juniors.

NUMBERS GAME

Argentina's FIFA World Cup squads of 1978 and 1982 were given numbers based on alphabetical order rather than positions, which meant the No. 1 shirt was worn by midfielders Norberto Alonso in 1978 and Osvaldo Ardiles in 1982. The only member of the 1982 squad whose shirt number broke the alphabetical order was No. 10, Diego Maradona.

BEGINNER'S LUCK

Aged just 27 years and 267 days old, Juan Jose Tramutola became the FIFA World Cup's youngest-ever coach when Argentina opened their 1930 campaign by beating France 1-0. Argentina went on to reach the final, only to lose 4-2 to Uruguay. Top-scorer at the 1930 FIFA World Cup was Argentina's Guillermo Stabile, with eight goals in four games – the only internationals he played. He later won six Copa America titles as his country's longest-serving coach between 1939 and 1960.



DO YOU COME HERE OFTEN?

Argentina and Uruguay have played each other more often than any other two nations, beginning with Argentina's 3-2 victory in Uruguay's capital Montevideo in 1901 – the first international staged outside the United Kingdom. The two teams have clashed another 196 times in official international matches since then, with Argentina winning 92 times in all, Uruguay 57, and 48 ending as draws.

TARNISHED GOLD

Despite winning Olympics football gold in 2004 and 2008 – with **Javier Mascherano** becoming the first male footballer since 1928 to collect two Olympic golds – Argentina surprisingly failed to qualify for the 2012 tournament in London. South America's two places went instead to Brazil and Uruguay, based on performances at the 2011 South American Youth Championship staged in Peru. Argentina had finished third in the final group of six.

MAJOR TOURNAMENTS

FIFA WORLD CUP **Winners (3)**	**18 appearances –** 1978, 1986, 2022
COPA AMERICA **Winners (16)**	**44 appearances –** 1921, 1925, 1927, 1929, 1937, 1941, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1955, 1957, 1959, 1991, 1993, 2021, 2024
CONFEDERATIONS CUP **Winners (1)**	**Three appearances –** 1992
FIRST INTERNATIONAL	**Uruguay 2 Argentina 3 (Montevideo, Uruguay, 16 May 1901)**
BIGGEST WIN	**Argentina 12 Ecuador 0 (Montevideo, Uruguay, 22 January 1942)**
BIGGEST DEFEATS	**Czechoslovakia 6 Argentina 1 (Helsingborg, Sweden, 15 June 1958);** **Argentina 0, Colombia 5 (Buenos Aires, 5 September 1993)** **Bolivia 6 Argentina 1 (La Paz, Bolivia, 1 April 2009)** **Spain 6 Argentina 1 (Madrid, Spain, 27 March 2018)**

A ROUND DOZEN

Argentina were responsible for the biggest win in Copa America history, when five goals by Jose Manuel Moreno helped them thrash Ecuador 12-0 in 1942. The much-travelled Moreno won domestic league titles in Argentina, Mexico, Chile and Colombia.

CHINA IN YOUR HAND

In an unusual move, the two 2008 Olympics football finalists Argentina and Nigeria were allowed to take two drinks breaks during the match, which was watched by 89,102 spectators. The game was played in stifling heat in Chinese host city Beijing. Angel Di Maria scored the only goal for Argentina, allowing them to retain the title they won in Athens – for the first time – four years earlier.



THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

Sergio Aguero struck in the final, and ended the tournament as six-goal top scorer, when Argentina won the FIFA World U-20 Championship for a record sixth time in 2007, in Canada, beating the Czech Republic 2-1. Two years later, Aguero married Giannina Maradona – the youngest daughter of Argentina legend Diego – and in February 2009 she gave birth to Diego's first grandchild, Benjamin. Sergio Aguero is widely known by his nickname of "Kun", after a cartoon character he was said to resemble as a child.

YELLOW GOODBYE

Some 20 years before France were forced to wear local Argentine club Atletico Kimberly's kit at the 1978 FIFA World Cup, Argentina themselves faced similar embarrassment for their first-round match against West Germany. The Argentines had neglected to bring along a second kit and a colour-clash with their opponents meant borrowing the yellow shirts of Swedish side IFK Malmo. Despite taking a third-minute lead, Argentina lost 3-1 and departed the tournament bottom of Group A.



PEOPLE'S FAVOURITE

Lionel Messi may be acclaimed as the finest footballer in the world – and one of the best of all-time – yet back home in Argentina the real hero for many fans is three-time South American Footballer of the Year **Carlos Tevez**. When Argentina staged the 2011 Copa America, team line-up announcements in stadia described Messi as "the best in the world" but Tevez as "the player of the people". Tevez grew up in poverty in Buenos Aires' tough "Fuerte Apache" neighbourhood and still bears scars on his neck from when boiling water was spilled on him as a child. Yet he ended the 2011 Copa America as a villain – his missed penalty gave Uruguay shoot-out victory in the quarter-final. Tevez failed even to make Argentina's squad for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, despite having scored 21 club goals the preceding season and been named Juventus's player of the year as they won their third consecutive Italian league title.

SPOT-KICK FLOP

If at first you don't succeed, try and try again – unfortunately Martin Palermo missed all three penalties he took during Argentina's 1999 Copa America clash with Colombia. The first hit the crossbar, the second flew over the bar and the third was saved. Colombia won the match 3-0.



WINNING TOUCH

Midfielder Marcelo Trobbiani played just two minutes of FIFA World Cup football – the last two minutes of the 1986 final, after replacing winning goalscorer Jorge Burruchaga. Trobbiani touched the ball once, a backheel. The former Boca star ended his international career with 15 caps and one goal to his name.

TOP SCORERS

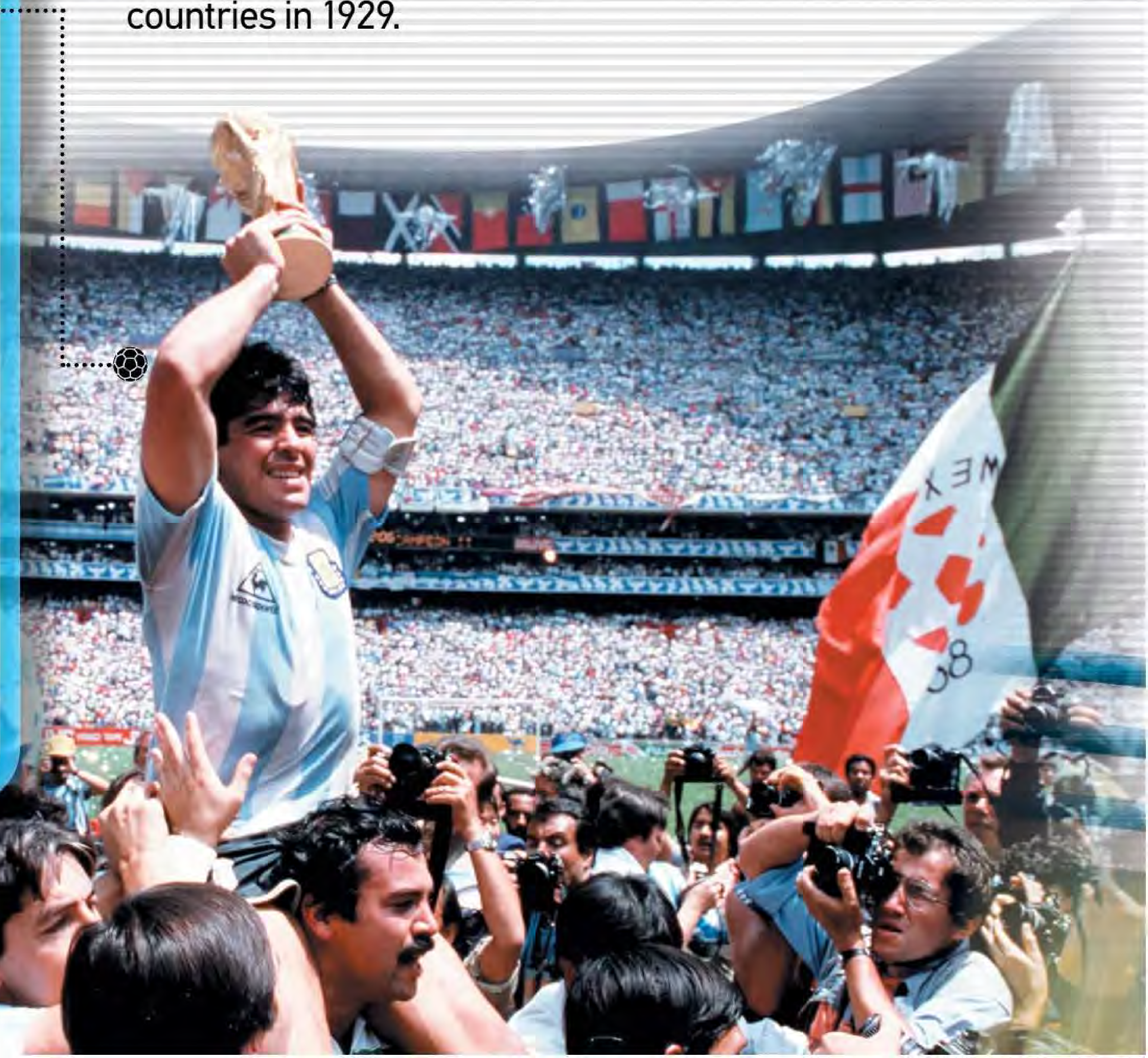
1	Lionel Messi	109
2	Gabriel Batistuta	56
3	Sergio Aguero	41
4	Hernan Crespo	35
5	Diego Maradona	34
6	Gonzalo Higuain	31
=	Angel Di Maria	31
8	Lautaro Martinez	29
9	Luis Artime	24
10	Daniel Passarella	22

SECOND TIME LUCKY

Luisito Monti is the only man to play in the the FIFA World Cup final for two different countries. The centre-half, born in Buenos Aires on 15 May 1901 but with Italian family origins, was highly influential in Argentina's run to the 1930 final. They lost the game 4-2 to Uruguay – after Monti allegedly received mysterious pre-match death threats. Following a transfer to Juventus the following year, he was allowed to play for Italy and was on the winning side when the *Azzurri* beat Czechoslovakia in the 1934 final. Another member of the 1934 team was Raimundo Orsi, who had also played for Argentina before switching countries in 1929.

DIVINE DIEGO

To many people **Diego Armando Maradona** is the greatest footballer the world has ever seen, better even than Pele. The Argentine legend, born in Lanus on 30 October 1960, first became famous as a ball-juggling child during half-time intervals at Argentinos Juniors matches. He was distraught to be left out of Argentina's 1978 FIFA World Cup squad and was then sent off for retaliation at the 1982 tournament. Maradona, as triumphant Argentina captain in Mexico in 1986, scored the notorious "Hand of God" goal and then a spectacular individual strike within five minutes of each other in a quarter-final win over England. He again captained Argentina to the final in 1990, in Italy – the country where he inspired Napoli to Serie A and UEFA Cup success. He was thrown out of the 1994 FIFA World Cup finals in disgrace after failing a drugs test. Maradona captained Argentina 16 times in FIFA World Cup matches, and to the surprise of many he was appointed national coach in 2008 despite scant previous experience as a manager.

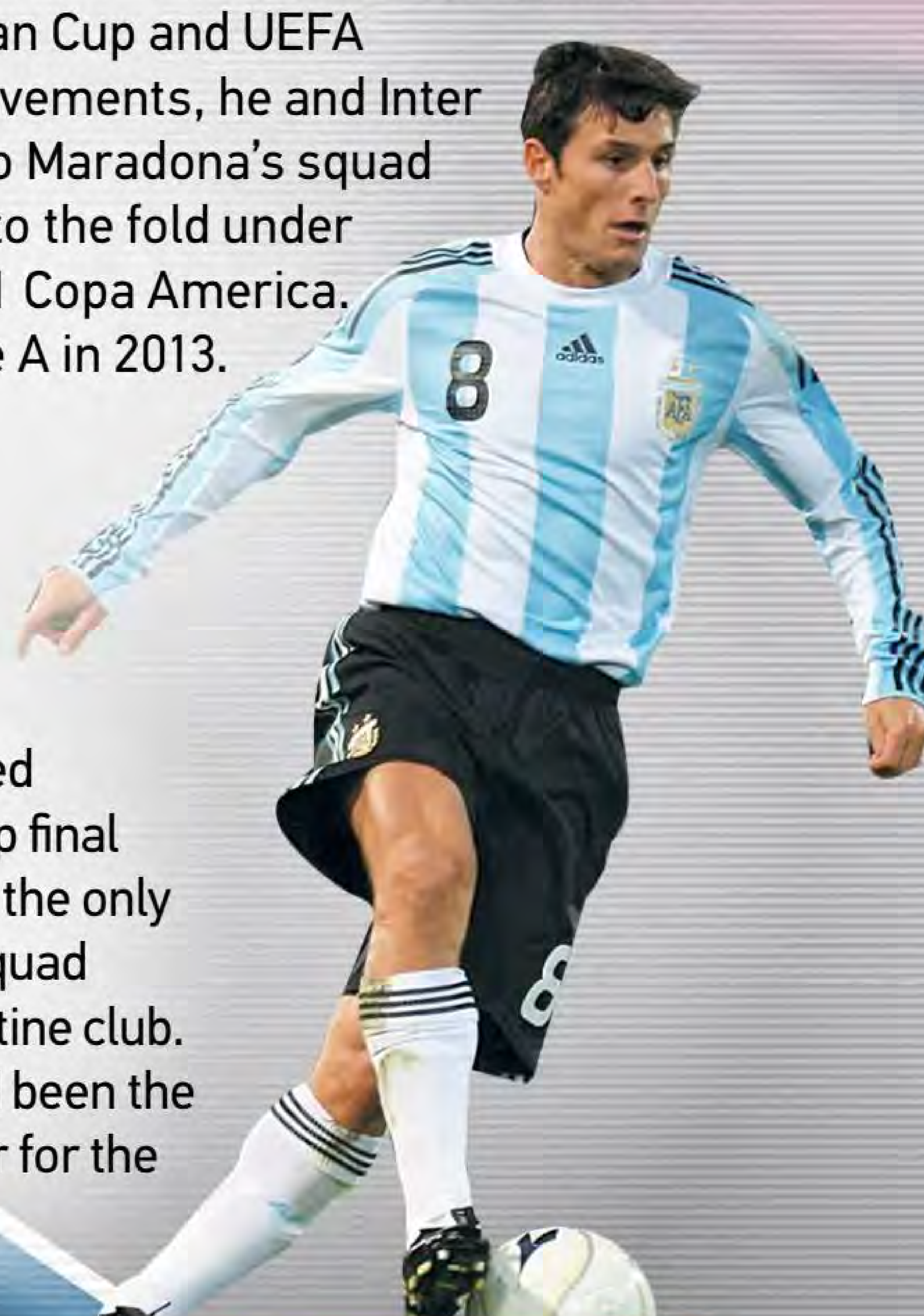




FITTER, JAVIER

Javier Zanetti is one of Argentina's most-capped player, with 143 international appearances – despite being surprisingly left out of squads for both the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups. Zanetti, who played at full-back and in midfield, also played more Serie A matches than any other non-Italian – and all for Inter Milan, with whom he won the treble of Italian league, Italian Cup and UEFA Champions League in 2009–10. Despite those achievements, he and Inter teammate Esteban Cambiasso failed to make Diego Maradona's squad for the 2010 FIFA World Cup – but Zanetti returned to the fold under Sergio Batista and captained his country at the 2011 Copa America.

Zanetti made his 600th appearance in Italy's Serie A in 2013.



THE ANGEL GABRIEL

Gabriel Batistuta, nicknamed "Batigol" and Argentina's previous all-time leading scorer, is the only man to have scored hat-tricks in two separate FIFA World Cups. He scored the first against Greece in 1994 and the second against Jamaica four years later. Hungary's Sandor Kocsis, France's Just Fontaine and Germany's Gerd Muller each scored two hat-tricks in the same FIFA World Cup. Batistuta, born in Reconquista on 1 February 1969, also set an Italian league record during his time with Fiorentina, by scoring in 11 consecutive Serie A matches at the start of the 1994-95 season.



SUPER MARIO

Mario Kempes, who scored twice in the 1978 FIFA World Cup final and won the Golden Boot, was the only member of Cesar Menotti's squad who played for a non-Argentine club. Playing for Valencia, he had been the Spanish league's top scorer for the previous two seasons.

TOP CAPS

1	**Lionel Messi**	**187**
2	**Javier Macherano**	**147**
3	**Javier Zanetti**	**145**
=	**Angel Di Maria**	**145**
5	**Nicolas Otamendi**	**119**
6	**Roberto Ayala**	**115**
7	**Diego Simeone**	**104**
8	**Sergio Aguero**	**101**
9	**Oscar Ruggeri**	**97**
10	**Sergio Romero**	**96**

KING OF THE WORLD

Finally, at the fifth attempt, the greatest player of all time is a World Cup winner. After making his World Cup debut at the 2006 tournament in Germany in a 6-0 drubbing of Serbia and Montenegro, Messi suffered heartbreak at the hands of the hosts in the quarter-finals, and the same opponents then battered Argentina 4-0 at the same stage in South Africa in 2010. Determined to go further in 2014, Messi dragged La Albiceleste to the final at the Maracana in Rio de Janiero only for Germany to yet again crush Argentine dreams with a 1-0 victory. Messi would lose out to the eventual champions yet again in Russia in 2018, a Kylian Mbappe-inspired France winning a topsy-turvy Round of 16 tie 4-3 in Kazan. When Argentina began their 2022 campaign in Qatar with a stunning 2-1 defeat to Saudi Arabia, Messi would have been forgiven for thinking his dreams of glory were once again dashed. But if he did harbour such concerns he hid them well, and thanks to several mercurial performances from their maestro, Lionel Scaloni's charges reached the final in Lusail, where, helped in no small part by a Messi brace, they defeated France to clinch the title.



SAINTED PALERMO

Veteran striker Martin Palermo waited 10 years between international appearances before being called up again by his former Boca Juniors team-mate Diego Maradona in 2009. He justified the surprise recall with a stoppage-time winner in the penultimate qualifier against Peru, prompting Maradona to take a celebratory dive in rain-sodden mud on the touchline and then hail it as "the miracle of St Palermo". Palermo also became his country's oldest-ever FIFA World Cup scorer, at the 2010 tournament in South Africa. He was 36 years and 227 days old when he came on as a substitute in the first round against Greece and completed the scoring in a 2-0 victory – a year and 358 days older than Maradona had been when scoring against the same country 16 years earlier.

BRAZIL



No country has captured the soul of the game to the same extent as Brazil. The country's distinctive yellow-shirted players have thrilled generations of football fans and produced some of the game's greatest moments. No FIFA World Cup tournament would be the same without Brazil – the nation that gave birth to Pele, Garrincha, Zico, Ronaldo and Kaka. The only nation to appear in every FIFA World Cup finals and competition winners a record five times, Brazil's home World Cup in 2014 tournament did not end with the sixth triumph they craved, but they have since gone on to win Olympic gold in 2016 and 2021.

FIERCEST RIVALS

Brazil's oldest club classic is Fluminense versus Botafogo in Rio de Janeiro. The clubs faced each other for the first time on 22 October 1905, when Fluminense won 6-0. One particular match stirred a controversy that lasted 89 years. The two teams disagreed on the result of the 1907 championship, whose title was disputed up to 1996... when they finally decided to share it.



NEYMAR GOES FOR GOLD

Brazil's long wait for Olympic success finally came to an end at the 2016 Games on home soil in Rio de Janeiro. Star forward **Neymar**, who in 2017 became the world's most expensive player after moving to PSG from Barcelona for £198 million, was the hero in the gold medal match. The striker put the hosts ahead in normal time against Germany, and while Max Meyer equalized to send the game to extra time, Neymar was again on hand to score the winning penalty in the climactic shoot-out. The win meant Brazil finally got their hands on the last major championship to have eluded them, and helped to exorcise the demons of their recent footballing history. The Seleçao had previously lost out to Mexico in the final of the London 2012 tournament, and the wounds of their 2014 World Cup drubbing at the hands of Germany were still fresh.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Brazil have been involved in many memorable games. Their 3-2 defeat to Italy in 1982 is regarded as one of the classic games in FIFA World Cup finals history. Paolo Rossi scored all three of Italy's goals with Brazil coach Tele Santana much criticized for going all out in attack when only a 2-2 draw was needed. Brazil's 1982 squad, with players such as **Socrates**, Zico and **Falcao**, is considered one of the greatest teams never to win the tournament. In 1994, a 3-2 win over the Netherlands in the quarter-finals – their first competitive meeting in 20 years – was just as thrilling, with all the goals coming in the second half. Socrates – a qualified medical doctor, as well as elder brother to 1994 FIFA World Cup-winner Rai – was mourned across the globe when he died at the age of 57 in December 2011.





BRAZIL'S RECORD

FIFA WORLD CUP	**22 appearances (every finals)**
Matches (114)	W76, D19, L19, GF237, GA108
Winners (5)	1958, 1962, 1970, 1994, 2002
Runners-up (2)	1950, 1998
Third place (2)	1938, 1978
Fourth place (1)	1974, 2014
COPA AMERICA	**38 appearances**
Winners (9)	1919, 1922, 1949, 1989, 1997, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2019
CONFEDERATIONS CUP	**Seven appearances**
Winners (4)	1997, 2005, 2009, 2013
FIRST INTERNATIONAL	**Argentina 3 Brazil 0 (Buenos Aires, 20 September 1914)**
BIGGEST WIN	**Brazil 10 Bolivia 1 (Sao Paulo, 10 April 1949)**
HEAVIEST DEFEAT	**Uruguay 6 Brazil 0 (Vina del Mar Chile, 18 September 1920) Brazil 1, Germany 7 (Belo Horizonte, 8 July 2014)**

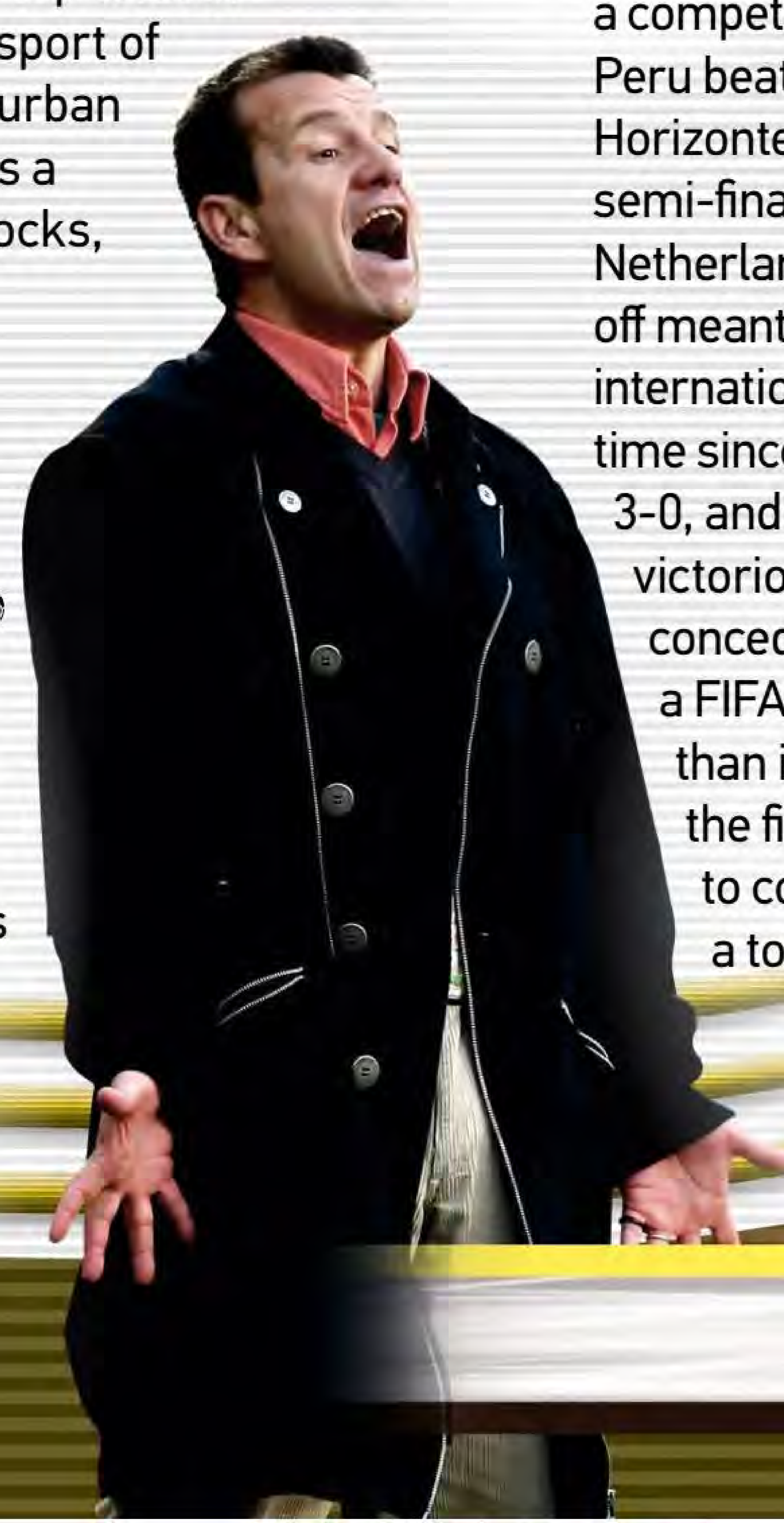


LAND OF FOOTBALL

No country is more deeply identified with football success than Brazil, who have won the FIFA World Cup a record five times – in 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002. They are also the only team never to have missed a FIFA World Cup finals and are favorites virtually every time the competition is staged. After winning the trophy for a third time in Mexico in 1970, Brazil kept the **Jules Rimet Trophy** permanently. Sadly, it was stolen from the federation's headquarters in 1983 and was never recovered. Brazilians often refer to their country as "o país do futebol" ("the country of football"). It is the favourite pastime of youngsters, while general elections are often held in the same year as the FIFA World Cup, with critics arguing that political parties try to take advantage of the nationalistic surge created by football and bring it into politics. Charles Miller, the son of a Scottish engineer, is credited with bringing football to Brazil in 1894. Yet the sport would only truly become Brazilian when blacks were able to play at the top level in 1933. At first, because of the game's European origin, it was the sport of Brazil's urban white elite. However, it quickly spread among the urban poor as Brazilians realized the only thing they needed to play was a ball, which could be substituted inexpensively with a bundle of socks, an orange, or even a cloth filled with paper.

TOP OF THE FLOPS

Brazil's dreams of winning a sixth FIFA World Cup, but first on home soil, became a nightmare in 2014 – 64 years on from the trauma caused by Uruguay's surprise triumph at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium. Luiz Felipe Scolari's 2014 vintage set a series of unenviable records as they crashed out, 7-1 to Germany, in the semi-final in Belo Horizonte. This was not only Brazil's heaviest FIFA World Cup defeat, but also the biggest any semi-finalist had ever suffered. It equalled the 6-0 trouncing by Uruguay at the 1920 Copa America as Brazil's worst defeat of all-time. Finally, it was Brazil's first home loss in a competitive international since Peru beat them 3-1 – also in Belo Horizonte – in a 1975 Copa America semi-final. A 3-0 setback against the Netherlands in the third-place play-off meant Brazil lost consecutive internationals at home for the first time since 1940, when Argentina, 3-0, and Uruguay 4-3, were victorious. The 14 goals Brazil conceded was their worst ever in a FIFA World Cup, three worse than in 1938, and they became the first FIFA World Cup hosts to concede the most goals in a tournament.



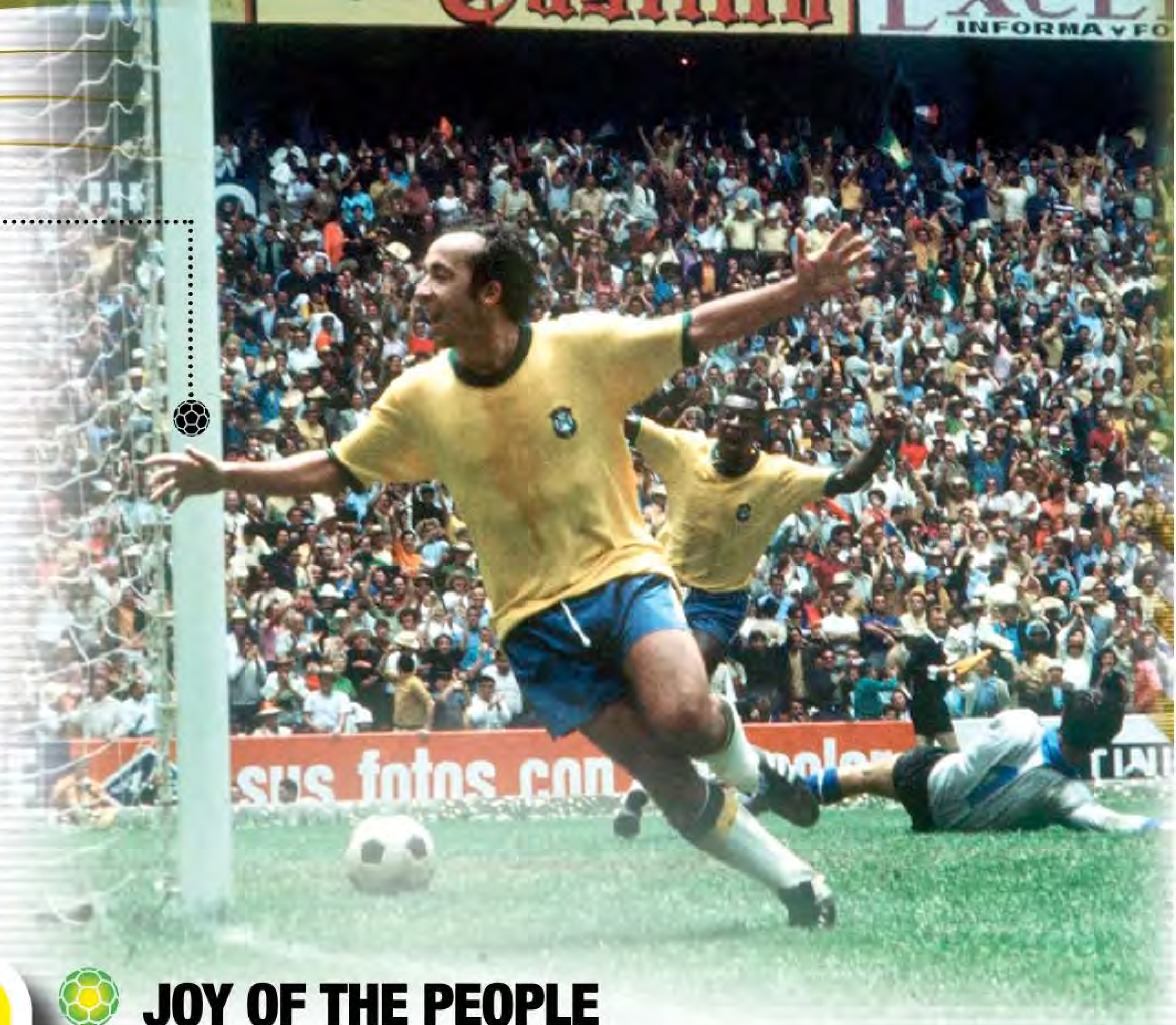
CAPTAIN TO COACH

Brazil's 1994 FIFA World Cup-winning captain **Dunga** was appointed national coach in 2006 despite having no previous management experience. He led the team to 2007 Copa America and 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup success. But he lost his job after Brazil were knocked out of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in a 2-1 quarter-final defeat to the Netherlands. Dunga – real name Carlos Caetano Bledorn Verri, but widely known by the Portuguese for "Dopey" – had already faced criticism back home for his team's defensive style and decisions not to take Ronaldinho, Adriano or Alexandre Pato to South Africa.



EYE FOR GOAL

Centre-forward **Tostao** – full name Eduardo Goncalves de Andrade – was one of the stars of Brazil's legendary 1970 FIFA World Cup-winning team but almost did not make the tournament. He had suffered a detached retina when hit in the face by a football the previous year, prompting some doctors' warnings that he should be left out. Tostao eventually retired at the age of 26 in 1973, after another eye injury, and went to work as a doctor instead. His 1970 team-mate Pele also experienced failing eyesight.



TOP CAPS

1	Cafu	142
2	Neymar	128
3	Dani Alves	126
4	Roberto Carlos	125
5	Thiago Silva	113
6	Lucio	105
7	Claudio Taffarel	101
8	Robinho	100
9	Ronaldo	98
=	Djalma Santos	98

JOY OF THE PEOPLE

Garrincha, one of Brazil's greatest legends, was really Manuel Francisco dos Santos at birth but his nickname meant 'Little Bird' – inspired by his slender, bent legs. Despite the legacy of childhood illness, he was a star right-winger at Botafogo from 1953 to 1965. He and Pele were explosively decisive newcomers for Brazil at the 1958 FIFA World Cup finals. In 1962 Garrincha was voted player of the tournament four years later. He died in January 1983 at just 49. His epitaph was the title often bestowed on him in life: "The Joy of the People."

TOP SCORERS

1	Neymar	79
2	Pele	77
3	Ronaldo	62
4	Romario	56
5	Zico	48
6	Bebeto	39
7	Rivaldo	35
8	Jairzinho	33
=	Ronaldinho	33
10	Ademir	32
=	Tostao	32



THE KING

Pele is considered by many as the greatest player of all time, a sporting icon *par excellence* and not only for his exploits on the pitch. When, for instance, he scored his 1,000th goal, Pele dedicated it to the poor children of Brazil. He began playing for Santos at the age of 15 and won his first FIFA World Cup two years later, scoring twice in the final. Despite numerous offers from European clubs, the economic conditions and Brazilian football regulations at the time allowed Santos to keep hold of their prized asset for almost two decades, until 1974. All-time leading scorer of the Brazilian national team, he is the only footballer to be a member of three FIFA World Cup-winning teams. Despite being in the Brazilian squad at the start of the 1962 tournament, an injury suffered in the second match meant he was not able to play on and, initially, he missed out on a winner's medal. However, FIFA announced in November 2007 that he would be awarded a medal retrospectively. After the disastrous 1966 tournament, when Brazil fell in the first round, Pele said he did not wish to play in the FIFA World Cup again. He was finally talked round and ended up, in 1970, playing a key role in what is widely considered as one of the greatest sides ever. After his retirement in 1977, Pele became a worldwide ambassador for football, as well undertaking various acting roles and commercial ventures. He sadly passed away in December 2022 at the age of 82.



PARTY ANIMAL

Brazil's captain when they played Argentina (twice), Costa Rica and Mexico in autumn 2011 was a man many had not even expected to be in the international side again – former two-time FIFA World Footballer of the Year, Ronaldinho. Having amazed the world with his fancy footwork and prolific goalscoring for Paris Saint-Germain in France, Barcelona in Spain and AC Milan in Italy, he returned to his homeland with Flamengo in 2011 – but was widely accused of being more interested in partying than playing. But a return to form won him a recall under Mano Menezes. That appearance against Mexico took him to 33 goals, level with 1970 FIFA World Cup winner Jairzinho, then his next match – his 94th for Brazil – equalled the caps tally of 1958 and 1962 FIFA World Cup champion goalkeeper Gilmar. Ronaldinho himself became a FIFA World Cup winner in 2002, aged 22, when his long-range goal against England gave Brazil victory in the quarter-finals – though he was sent off seven minutes later and had to sit out the semi-final, before returning for the final.





WHITHER RONALDO?

Only one person knows exactly what happened to **Ronaldo** in the hours before the 1998 FIFA World Cup final – the man himself. He sparked one of the biggest mysteries in FIFA World Cup history when his name was left off the teamsheet before the game, only for it to reappear just in time for kick-off. It was initially reported that Ronaldo had an ankle injury, and then an upset stomach. Finally team doctor Lidio Toledo revealed the striker had been rushed to hospital after suffering a convulsion in his sleep, but that he had been cleared to play after neurological and cardiac tests. The most dramatic account came from Ronaldo's roommate Roberto Carlos. "Ronaldo was scared about what lay ahead. The pressure had got to him and he couldn't stop crying," said the legendary full-back. "At about four o'clock, he became ill. That's when I called the team doctor and told him to get over to our room as fast as he could."

HOME COMFORTS

The hosts of the FIFA World Cup have never lost their first match of that tournament, and Brazil continued that run by beating Croatia 3-1 in what was also the opening match of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. It was Brazil's ninth consecutive victory in their finals opener. Neymar scored twice against Croatia, making him the first Brazil player to hit a brace in his FIFA World Cup debut.

THAT'S MY BOY

When Bebeto scored for Brazil against the Netherlands in their 1994 FIFA World Cup quarter-final, he and strike partner Romario celebrated with a "cradling the baby" dance that would be much-imitated for years to come. Bebeto's wife had just given birth to their son Matheus – who would grow up to become a footballer himself, joining Flamengo's youth set-up in 2011. By this time, both **Bebeto** (middle) and **Romario** (right, Mazinho is left) were in tandem again – as elected politicians in Brazil.



INAUSPICIOUS START

Left-back/left-winger **Marcelo** achieved the dubious "honour" of being the first player to score the opening goal of a FIFA World Cup finals in his own net. He inadvertently gave Croatia the lead in the 2014 tournament's curtain-raiser in Sao Paulo, but Brazil did come back to win 3-1, thanks to a pair of goals from Neymar and one from Oscar. Marcelo, who a couple of weeks earlier had scored for his club, Real Madrid, as they won the UEFA Champions League final, also became the first Brazil player ever to score past his own goalkeeper in the FIFA World Cup finals.

BOBBY DAZZLER

At 17 years, three months and 27 days, Endrick became the fourth-youngest player to appear for Brazil when he took to the field against Colombia on 17 November 2023. He followed this remarkable achievement up by netting the only goal of the game against England at Wembley the following March, after which he spoke of his admiration for Bobby Charlton. His Real Madrid and Brazil teammate Rodrygo later revealed that Endrick, who is still only 18, is now affectionately known as "Bobby".

CHILE

Chile were one of four founding members of CONMEBOL, South America's football confederation, in 1916. They played in the first match at a South American football championship in 1910 and also played in the first official Copa America, in 1916. Runners-up on four occasions, in 1955, 1956, 1979 and 1987, they finally won their first Copa America on home soil in 2015, beating Argentina on penalties, before incredibly repeating the feat a year later in the centennial tournament. Chile also famously hosted and finished third at the 1962 World Cup.



TOP SCORERS

1	Alexis Sanchez	51
2	Eduardo Vargas	43
3	Marcelo Salas	37
4	Ivan Zamorano	34
=	Arturo Vidal	34
6	Carlos Caszely	29
7	Leonel Sanchez	24
8	Jorge Aravena	22
9	Humberto Suazo	21
10	Juan Carlos Letelier	18

BEAUSEJOUR ENDS THE WAIT

Chile went precisely 48 years between victories at a FIFA World Cup, from a 1-0 third-place play-off success against Yugoslavia on 16 June 1962 to a first-round victory by the same scoreline over Honduras on 16 June 2010. That long-awaited winner in South Africa came from **Jean Beausejour**, who then hit Chile's third in their opening-game 3-1 triumph over Australia in Brazil four years later. It meant he became the first Chilean player ever to score at more than one FIFA World Cup. Goalkeeper and captain at both tournaments was Claudio Bravo, Chile's most capped player.



CENTRE-BACK'S HAT-TRICK

The first player to be named South American Footballer of the Year three times was not Pele, Garrincha or Diego Maradona but Chilean centre-back **Elias Figueroa**, who took the prize in three consecutive years from 1974 to 1976 while playing for Brazilian club Internacional. The only players to emulate such a hat-trick were Brazil's Zico, in 1977, 1981 and 1982, and Argentina forward Carlos Tevez, in 2003, 2004 and 2005. Two more Chileans have won the award: Marcelo Salas in 1997 and Matias Fernandez in 2006. Outside of Brazil and Argentina, the most winners of the prize have come from Chile and Paraguay, with five apiece. Although Figueroa started and ended his playing career in Chile, he also played for clubs in Brazil, Uruguay and the US, while also representing his country for 16 years from 1966 to 1982 – including FIFA World Cup appearances in 1966, 1974 and 1982.

TOP DOG ALEXIS



Chile's youngest-ever international is also now their all-time leading goalscorer, striker **Alexis Sanchez**. He was just 17 years and four months old when he made his debut against New Zealand in April 2006, the month before he left South America to sign for Italy's Udinese. He spent loan spells back in Chile and Argentina before making his breakthrough in Serie A with eye-catching displays that earned a move to Barcelona in 2011. After three years and multiple trophies, he made his way to London in a deal worth £31.7 million, where his dazzling skills and eye for goal quickly made him a fan favourite.

Sanchez's exploits for Chile have been no less impressive, as he played a crucial role in their back-to-back Copa America wins in 2015 and 2016. In June 2017, he overtook Marcelo Salas to become Chile's leading all-time goalscorer, with his 38th goal for his country coming in a 1-1 draw against world champions Germany in the FIFA Confederations Cup. He'd equalled Salas's record three months earlier with a stunning free kick in a 3-1 win over Venezuela.

TOP CAPS

1	Alexis Sanchez	166
2	Gary Medel	161
3	Claudio Bravo	150
4	Mauricio Isla	144
5	Arturo Vidal	142
6	Gonzalo Jara	115
7	Eduardo Vargas	114
8	Jean Beausejour	109
9	Charles Aranguiz	101
10	Leonel Sanchez	85

SALAS DAYS



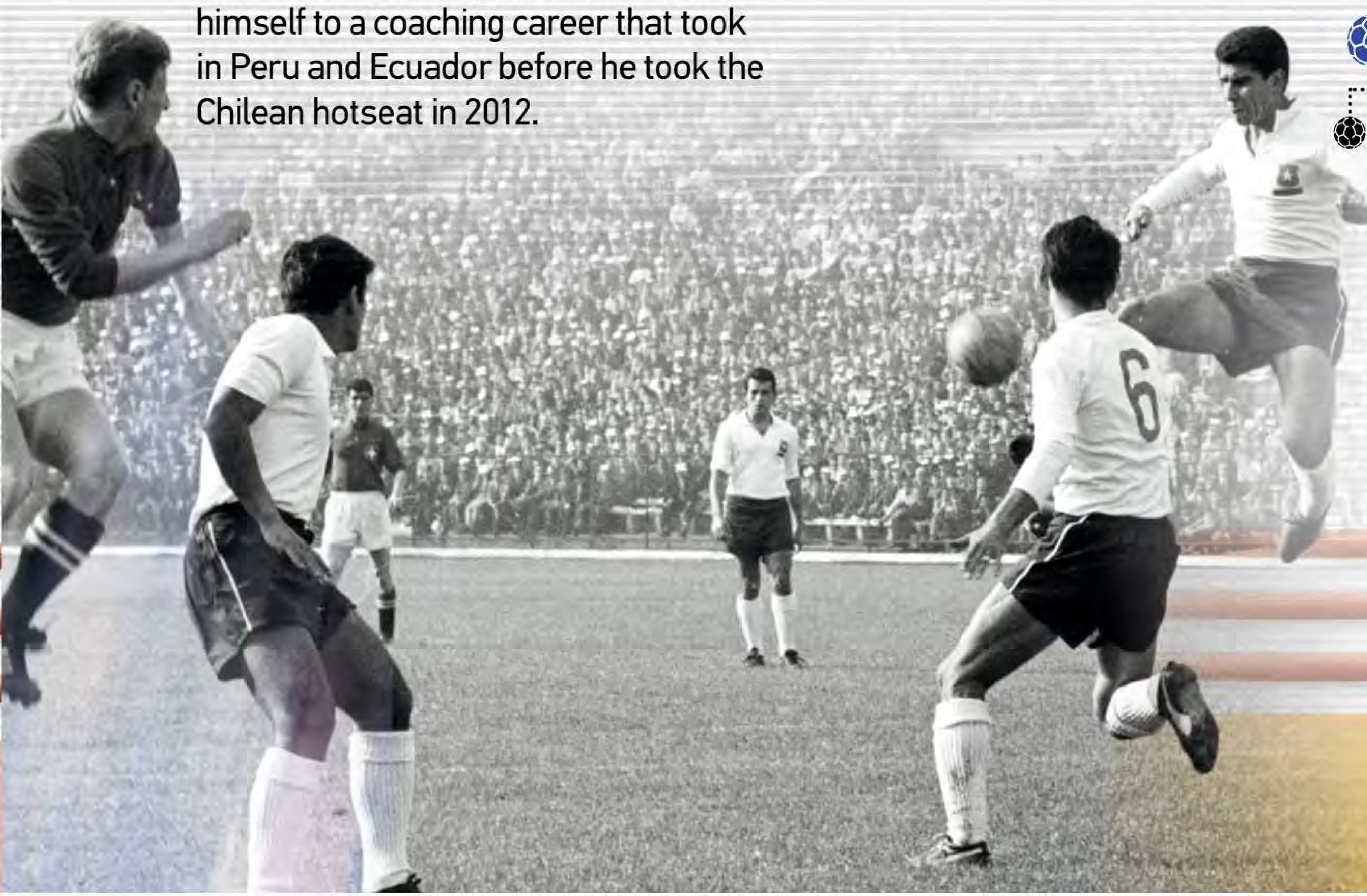
Chile's **Marcelo Salas** formed a much-feared strike partnership with Ivan Zamorano during the late 1990s and early 21st century. Salas scored four goals as Chile reached the second round of the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France despite not winning a game. The striker spent two years in international retirement, from 2005 to 2007, but returned for the first four games of qualification for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. He scored twice in Chile's 2-2 draw with Uruguay on 18 November 2007, but his international career ended for good three days later, following a 3-0 defeat to Paraguay.

HAPPY SAMP

Chile had never reached the knock-out stages of consecutive FIFA World Cups until their 2014 vintage in Brazil matched the 2010 squad's achievement. And both times they had coaches from Argentina: Marcelo Bielsa was in charge in 2010 and Jorge Sampaoli four years later – and another compatriot, Claudio Borghi, served a spell in between. Sampaoli retired from playing aged 19, because of tibia and fibula injuries, and devoted himself to a coaching career that took in Peru and Ecuador before he took the Chilean hotseat in 2012.

BRAVO, CLAUDIO

Chile had to wait almost a century for their first taste of Copa America glory, before two outstanding victories came along in the space of two years. The Chileans triumphed on home soil in 2015 and won the Centenario edition of the tournament in the United States a year later. There were some striking similarities between the two victories – both came via penalty shoot-out wins over Argentina after the final had ended 0-0. Chile goalkeeper Claudio Bravo was also the hero on both occasions, saving from Ever Banega in 2015 and Lucas Biglia in 2016 to help his side to victory.



LUCKY LEO

Leonel Sanchez previously held the Chilean record for international appearances, scoring 23 goals in 84 games. But he was lucky to remain on the pitch for one of them. Sanchez escaped an early bath despite punching Italy's Humberto Maschio in the face during their so-called "Battle of Santiago" clash at the 1962 FIFA World Cup, when English referee Ken Aston could have sent off more than just the two players he did dismiss. Sanchez, a left-winger born in Santiago on 25 April 1936, finished the tournament as one of its six four-goal leading scorers – along with Brazilians Garrincha and Vava, Russian Valentin Ivanov, Yugoslav Drazan Jerkovic and Hungarian Florian Albert.

URUGUAY

Uruguay was the first country to win a FIFA World Cup, in 1930, and with a population of under four million, they remain the smallest to do so. They claimed the game's greatest prize for a second time in 1950, having already won Olympic gold in 1924 and 1928. Recent years were less productive, until a fourth-place finish at the 2010 FIFA World Cup and a record-breaking 15th Copa America triumph the following year catapulted Uruguay back to the top of world football.



TOP SCORERS

1	Luis Suarez	69
2	Edinson Cavani	58
3	Diego Forlan	36
4	Hector Scarone	31
5	Angel Romano	28
6	Oscar Miguez	27
7	Sebastian Abreu	26
8	Pedro Petrone	24
9	Carlos Aguilera	22
=	Fernando Morena	22

FORLAN HERO

Diego Forlan was Uruguay's star man at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, scoring five goals – including three from outside the penalty area, the first player to achieve that feat at a FIFA World Cup since Germany's Lothar Matthaus in 1990. He also hit the crossbar with a free-kick, the final touch of his country's 3-2 defeat to Germany in the 2010 third-place play-off. Uruguay's fourth-place finish in South Africa meant Diego fared better than his father, Pablo, who had played in the Uruguay team that was knocked out in the first round of the 1974 FIFA World Cup.

DIFFERENT BALL GAME

Uruguay were the inaugural hosts – and the first winners – of the FIFA World Cup in 1930, having won football gold at the Olympics of 1924 in Paris and 1928 in Amsterdam. Among the players who won all three of those titles was forward Hector Scarone, who remains Uruguay's second-highest scorer with 31 goals in 52 internationals. Uruguay beat arch-rivals Argentina 4-2 in the 1930 final, in a game which used two different footballs – Argentina's choice in the first half, in which they led 2-1, before Uruguay's was used for their second-half comeback.

GET IN, GODIN

Centre-back **Diego Godin's** crucial late headed goal gave Uruguay a 1-0 Group D win over Italy at the 2014 FIFA World Cup and a place in the second round at Italy's expense. Godin developed a knack for crucial strikes in 2014: his goal secured a first Spanish league title in 18 years for Atletico Madrid in May 2014, and he gave them the lead in the UEFA Champions League final, only to lose 4-1 to Real Madrid.



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

A so-called 'Mundialito', or 'Little World Cup', was staged in December 1980 and January 1981 to mark the 50th anniversary of the FIFA World Cup – and, as in 1930, Uruguay emerged triumphant. The tournament was meant to involve all six countries who had previously won the tournament, though 1966 champions England turned down the invitation and were replaced by 1978 runners-up Holland. Uruguay beat Brazil 2-1 in the final, a repeat of the scoreline from the two teams' final match of the 1950 FIFA World Cup. The Mundialito-winning Uruguay side was captained by goalkeeper Rodolfo Rodriguez and coached by Roque Maspoli, who had played in goal in that 1950 final.

TOP CAPS

1	Diego Godin	161
2	Luis Suarez	143
3	Edinson Cavani	136
4	Fernando Muslera	133
5	Maxi Pereira	125
6	Martin Caceres	116
7	Diego Forlan	112
8	Cristian Rodriguez	110
9	Diego Lugano	95
10	Egidio Arevalo Rios	90

CAV FAITH

It took just three minutes for **Edinson Cavani** to score his first international goal, after coming on as a substitute for his Uruguay debut against Colombia in February 2008. He not only helped Uruguay finish fourth at the 2010 FIFA World Cup and win a record 15th Copa America in 2011, but his scoring exploits in club football for Italy's Napoli and Paris Saint-Germain in France have established him as one of the world's finest modern strikers. Cavani, a devout Christian, received high praise from the Archbishop of Naples, Crescenzio Sepe, who said: "God serves himself by having Cavani score goals." The forward was given his Uruguay debut by Oscar Tabarez, a former schoolteacher known as "The Maestro", whose second spell as international boss began in 2006. Cavani was aged just three when Tabarez led Uruguay at their most recent FIFA World Cup before 2010, reaching the second round in 1990.



BITE RETURN

Notoriety has cast many shadows over the career of **Luis Suarez** and the controversy he caused at the 2010 FIFA World Cup was mild compared to what followed in Brazil four years later. Uruguay's all-time leading scorer is one of the world's most talented strikers but is also a danger not only to others but to himself and team-mates. He earned infamy with a deliberate goal-line handball to concede a penalty when Uruguay and Ghana were level in their 2010 FIFA World Cup quarter-final – then celebrated wildly when Asamoah Gyan missed – and Uruguay won the resulting shoot-out. Worse followed, however, at the 2014 FIFA World Cup, when he bit into the shoulder of Italian defender Giorgio Chiellini, earning himself a nine-match international ban and a four-month suspension from all football. Astonishingly, this was the third time Suarez had bitten someone on the football field – having previously done so while playing for both Ajax Amsterdam and Liverpool. His scoring instincts are much more admirable – his 47 international goals include four during Uruguay's triumphant 2011 Copa America campaign. Suarez does inspire loyalty among supporters and team-mates, who even pegged his shirt up in the dressing-room before their 2014 second-round clash with Colombia despite his enforced departure from Brazil the previous day. He retired from international football in 2024.



BOYS IN BLUE

Uruguay's 3-2 home loss to Argentina, in Montevideo on 16 May 1901, was the first international match staged outside the UK. The second, on 20 July 1902, ended 6-0 to Argentina – still the *Celeste*'s heaviest loss. They have played each other another 187 times in official internationals – a world record – with Uruguay winning 58, Argentina 86, and 43 draws. Before an agreed kit-swap in 1910, Uruguay often wore vertical light-blue and white stripes and arch-rivals Argentina would don pale-blue shirts.

TRAVEL SICKNESS

Despite winning the 1930 FIFA World Cup, Uruguay turned down the chance to defend their crown four years later, when the tournament was held in Italy. Uruguayan football authorities were unhappy that only four European countries had made the effort to travel to Uruguay and take part in 1930.

OLE, FRANCESCOLI

Until Diego Forlan passed him in 2011, no outfield player had represented Uruguay more often than **Enzo Francescoli** (73 caps) – and few can have taken the field quite so gracefully as the playmaker whose club career included stints with River Plate in Argentina, Racing and Marseille in France and Cagliari and Torino in Italy. His international swansong for Uruguay brought Copa America glory in 1995, when he starred as both midfielder and emergency striker and also scored one of Uruguay's spot-kicks in their penalty shoot-out final victory over Brazil. Among Francescoli's high-profile fans was Zinedine Zidane, who later named his first-born son Enzo, in honour of the Uruguayan maestro.



OTHER TEAMS SOUTH AMERICA

GOING CARACAS FOR FOOTBALL

Baseball and boxing may have held more sway with Venezuelans in recent decades but football fever has been on the rise in the 21st century – given a big boost by the country staging its first Copa America in 2007. This not only saw extravagant investment in new stadia but also Venezuela's first Copa America victory since 1967 – and unprecedented progress into the knock-out stages. **Juan Arango,** a popular success in Spain with La Liga club RCD Mallorca, scored Venezuela's goal in a 4-1 quarter-final loss to Uruguay. They followed this relative breakthrough by finishing eighth out of 10 in South America's qualification campaign for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, then sixth of nine for 2014 – above Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay.



NATIONAL STADIUMS

Bolivia:
Estadio Hernando Siles,
La Paz (45,000 capacity)

Chile:
Estadio Nacional,
Santiago (63,379)

Colombia:
Estadio Metropolitano Roberto Meléndez,
Barranquilla (48,600)

Ecuador:
Estadio Olimpico Atahualpa,
Quito (40,948)

Paraguay:
Estadio Defensores del Chaco,
Asuncion (42,000)

Peru:
Estadio Nacional,
Lima (50,000)

Venezuela:
Estadio Polideportivo
de Pueblo Nuevo,
San Cristobal (38,755)

BOLIVIA LEAVE IT LATE

Bolivia have only ever won the Copa America once, but did so in dramatic and memorable style when playing host in 1963. They were the only team to finish the competition unbeaten in all six matches, topping the league table. But they almost threw away glory on the competition's final day, twice squandering two-goal leads against Brazil. Bolivia led 2-0 before being pegged back to 2-2, then saw a 4-2 advantage turn to 4-4, before Maximo Alcocer scored what proved to be Bolivia's winning goal with four minutes remaining.



ENNER THE OTHER VALENCIA

Ecuador striker **Enner Valencia**'s hot scoring streak in 2014 saw him find the net six times across five consecutive matches – including three strikes at that summer's FIFA World Cup. His brace in the 2-1 Group E win over Honduras made him the first Ecuadorian to score more than once in a FIFA World Cup game. His fortunes were in stark contrast to those of his namesake, Ecuador captain Antonio Valencia. The Manchester United winger was sent off in their final first-round game against France – and it was his second red card in four internationals, having been dismissed in a pre-tournament friendly against England.

YEP MAN

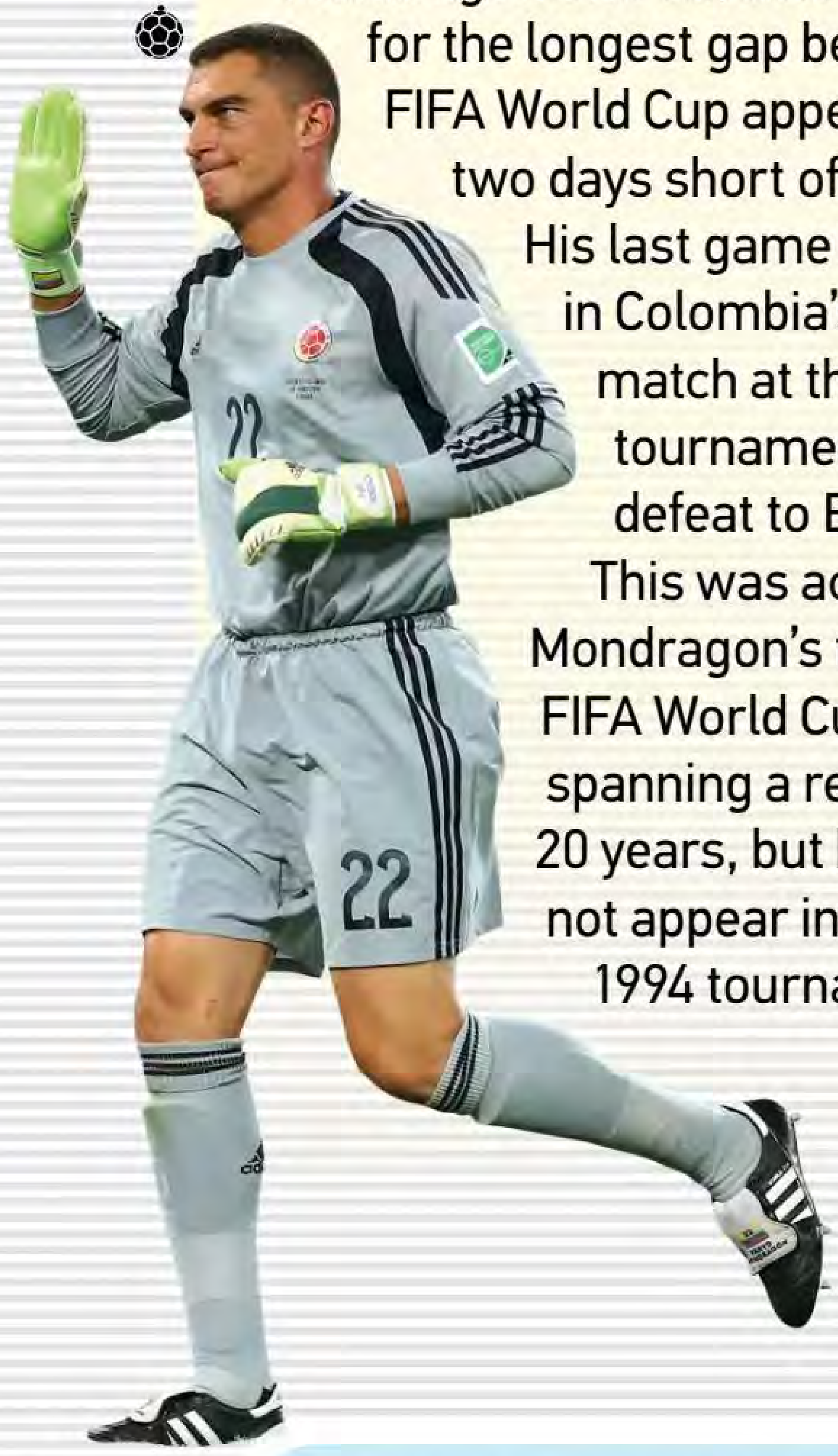
Two of Colombia's most-capped players are **Carlos Valderrama** (first, with 111 appearances) and Leonel Alvarez (third, with 101). Valderrama led the criticism when Alvarez was fired after just three games as national coach in 2011. But his successor, ex-Argentina boss Jose Pekerman, led Colombia to the 2014 FIFA World Cup quarter-finals – their best ever performance. Colombia defender Mario Yepes, at 38 one of the finals' oldest players, won four more caps to take him to 102. He had been worried about playing on, but right-back Camilo Zuniga said, "You have to be there – we'll do the running for you."



RE-ENTER THE MONDRAGON

Colombia goalkeeper **Faryd Mondragon** set a number of records at the 2014 FIFA World Cup. He became the oldest player to appear in the finals when he came on as a substitute with five minutes remaining of their first-round match against Japan, on 24 June, aged 43 years and three days, breaking the record formerly held by Cameroon's 42-year-old Roger Milla in 1994.

Mondragon also set a new mark for the longest gap between FIFA World Cup appearances, two days short of 16 years. His last game had been in Colombia's final match at the 1998 tournament – a 2-0 defeat to England. This was actually Mondragon's third FIFA World Cup finals, spanning a record 20 years, but he did not appear in the 1994 tournament.



ABOVE-PAR PARAGUAY

In their eighth appearance at a FIFA World Cup, Paraguay topped their first-round group for the first time in 2010. Not only that, they went on to reach a later stage of the tournament than ever before, the quarter-finals, before narrowly losing 1-0 to Spain. Their penalty shoot-out victory over Japan in the second round (Oscar Cardozo converting the decisive kick) meant four South American countries made the quarter-finals – outnumbering the three European nations – for the first time. That said, there were no quarter-finals in 1930, 1950, 1974, 1978 or 1982. Paraguay followed up their impressive FIFA World Cup display by reaching the final of the following year's Copa America, only losing in the end to Uruguay (3-0).

BIGGEST DEFEATS

Brazil 10 Bolivia 1
(10 April 1949)

Brazil 9 Colombia 0
(24 March 1997)

Argentina 12 Ecuador 0
(22 January 1942)

Argentina 8 Paraguay 0
(20 October 1926)

Brazil 7 Peru 0
(26 June 1997)

Argentina 11 Venezuela 0
(10 August 1975)

GUESS PERU'S BACK?

Peru qualified for their first FIFA World Cup in 36 years when they reached Russia in 2018. They returned with gusto, pushing eventual winners France all the way in a narrow 1-0 defeat. Denmark also inflicted a tight 1-0 defeat on the Peruvians, but they finished on a high with a 2-0 win over Australia.

HIGH LIFE

Bolivia and Ecuador play their home internationals at higher altitudes than any other teams on earth. Bolivia's showpiece Estadio Hernando Siles stadium, in the capital La Paz, is 3,637 metres (11,932ft) above sea level, while Ecuador's main Estadio Olimpico Atahualpa, in Quito, sits 2,800 metres (9,185ft) above sea level. Opposing teams have complained that the rarefied nature of the air makes it difficult to breathe, let alone play, but a FIFA ban on playing competitive internationals at least 2,500 metres (8,200ft) above sea level, first introduced in May 2007, was amended a month later – adjusting the limit to 3,000 metres (9,840ft) and allowing Estadio Hernando Siles to be used as a special case. The altitude ban was suspended entirely in May 2008. FIFA had changed its mind after protests by Bolivia, Ecuador and other affected nations Colombia and Peru. Other campaigners to overturn the law included Argentina legend Diego Maradona. He may have regretted his decision. In March 2009 Bolivia scored a 6-1 home win against Argentina in a FIFA World Cup qualifier. The Argentina coach was... Diego Maradona.

BIGGEST WINS

Bolivia 7 Venezuela 0
(22 August 1993)

Bolivia 9 Haiti 2
(3 March 2000)

Bahrain 0 Colombia 6
(26 March 2015)

Ecuador 6 Venezuela 1
(15 June 1973)

Paraguay 7 Bolivia 0
(30 April 1949)

Hong Kong 0 Paraguay 7
(17 November 2010)

Peru 9 Ecuador 1
(11 August 1938)

Venezuela 7 Puerto Rico 0
(26 December 1946)

STUDYING THE FORM

Peru captain **Claudio Pizarro** is the highest-scoring foreign-born footballer in Germany's Bundesliga, his successful spells – two apiece – with Werder Bremen and Bayern Munich bringing him 176 goals in 370 league games, as well as a 2012–13 UEFA Champions League winners' medal with Bayern. His international career has been patchier, hampered by a fractured skull suffered against Venezuela at the 2004 Copa America and a three-month ban for joining a hotel party while on international duty in 2007. But he did score Peru's fastest international goal, after 18 seconds of their 3-1 friendly victory over Mexico in August 2003. He has also enjoyed success off the football field and on the racing track, as co-owner – with English footballer Joey Barton – of a racehorse named Crying Lightning, after a song by the rock band the Arctic Monkeys.



AFRICA

The African confederation organised its inaugural Cup of Nations in 1957, only a year after it was founded. Egypt, with a record seven victories, were the first winners, while some of the most recent victors include, Ivory Coast in 2015, Cameroon in 2017, Algeria in 2019 and Senegal in 2021. The FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010 was Africa's first finals, and the wait for an African semi-finalist was finally ended in 2022 when Morocco reached the last four in Qatar after beating Belgium, Canada, Spain and Portugal.



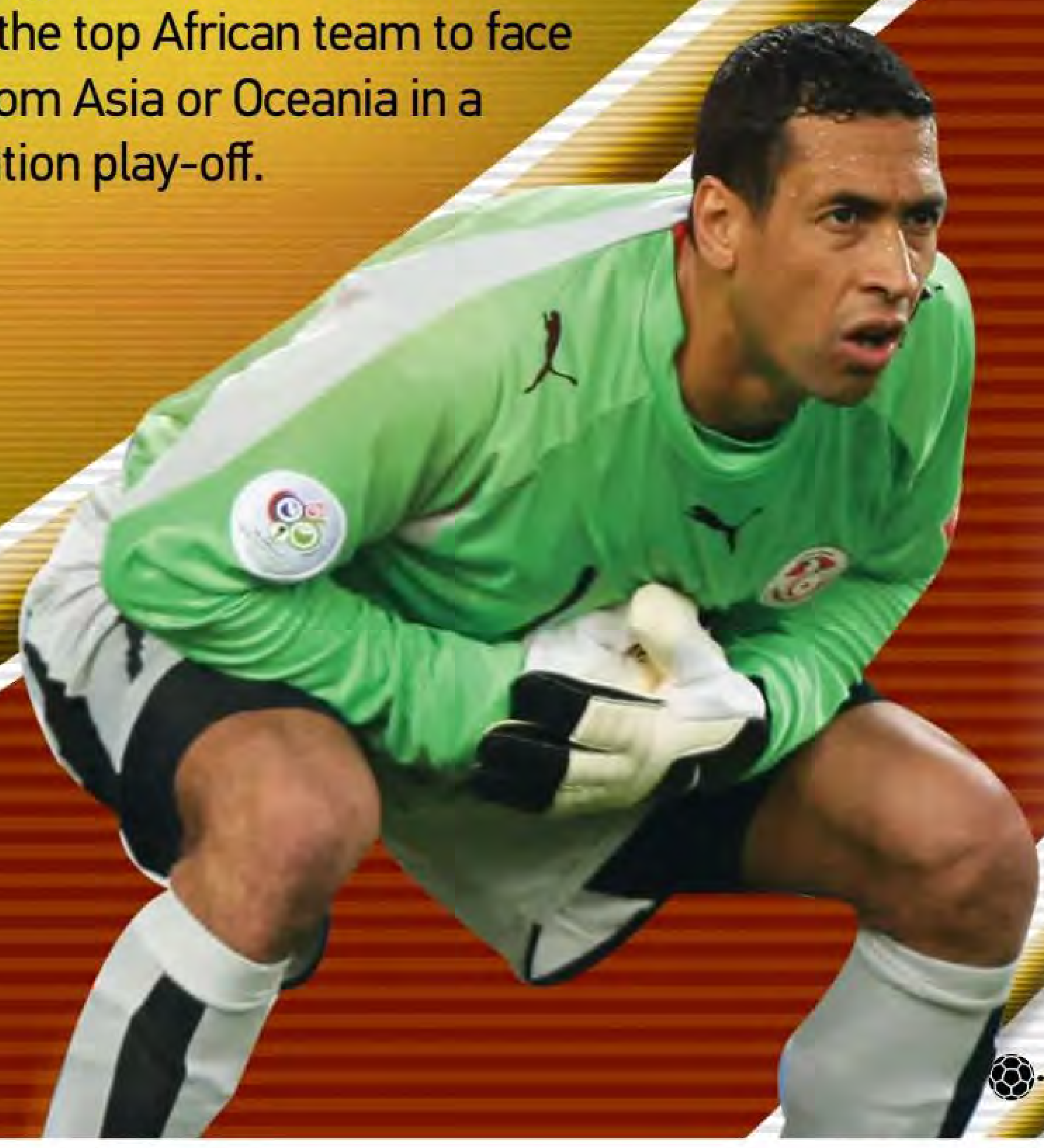
Morocco fans hail the Atlas Lions in Qatar. Mixing creativity with defensive stability, the North African side beat three European big hitters en route to a fourth-place finish.



NORTH AFRICA FIFA WORLD CUP RECORDS

FAWZI'S FIRST
Abdelrahman Fawzi became the first African footballer to score at a FIFA World Cup, when he pulled a goal back for Egypt against Hungary in the first round of the 1934 tournament – then scored an equalizer eight minutes later, to make it 2-2 at half-time. Egypt went on to lose the match 4-2, and would not return to the finals for another 56 years.

PLAY-OFF PIQUE
Morocco's qualification for the 1970 FIFA World Cup ended a 36-year African exile from the finals. No African countries played at the 1966 FIFA World Cup in Africa, with 16 possible candidate countries all boycotting the event because FIFA wanted the top African team to face a side from Asia or Oceania in a qualification play-off.





AGELESS ALI
Tunisian goalkeeper **Ali Boumnijel** played in all three of his country's games at the 2006 FIFA World Cup – making him the oldest player to feature in Germany that summer, as well as only the fifth man over the age of 40 to play at a FIFA World Cup. Boumnijel conceded six goals in those three matches, against Saudi Arabia (two, in a 2-2 draw), Spain (three, in a 3-1 defeat) and Ukraine (one, in a 1-0 loss).

HAIL HALLICHE
Algeria became the first African nation to score four goals in one game at a FIFA World Cup finals when they defeated South Korea 4-2 at Porto Alegre in their Group H contest in the Brazil 2014 tournament. The Algerians went on to finish second in the group, behind winners Belgium, and thus qualified for the knock-out stages for the first time. In the second round they faced one of the tournament favourites, Germany, and Algeria only departed after losing a thrilling match 2-1 after extra time. One of Algeria's scorers in the victory over South Korea on 22 June – they had raced into a 3-0 half-time lead – was centre-back **Rafik Halliche** (he headed the second goal), who by the end of the 2014 tournament had made eight FIFA World Cup appearances – a new Algerian record.

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN
Aged 45 years and 161 days, Egypt goalkeeper Essam El Hadary became the oldest player in FIFA World Cup history when he represented the North African nation at the 2018 FIFA World Cup. He saved a penalty on his World Cup debut against Saudi Arabia but couldn't prevent Egypt from losing 2-1.

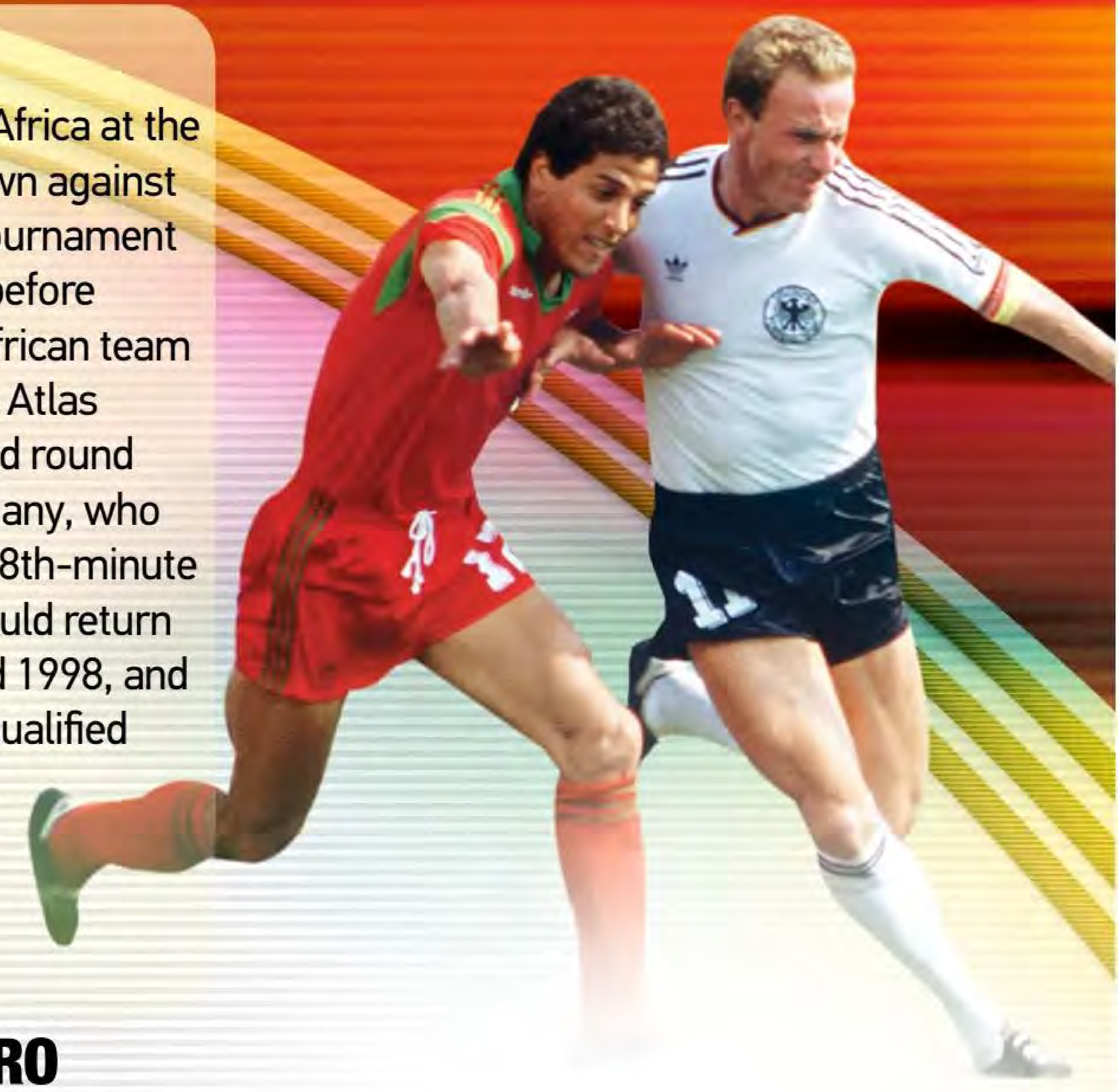


DJAB FAB
Barring penalty shoot-outs, no African has scored a later FIFA World Cup goal than Algerian midfielder **Abdelmoumene Djabou**. His consolation strike in a 2-1 second-round loss to Germany on 30 June 2014 was timed at 120 minutes and 50 seconds. This was the third meeting between the two teams. Algeria had followed a 2-0 friendly win in 1964 with a shock 2-1 success at the 1982 FIFA World Cup.



MOROCCAN ROLL

When it comes to breaking new ground for Africa at the World Cup, Morocco are without equal. Drawn against England, Poland and Portugal at the 1986 tournament in Mexico, Morocco drew with the first two before stunning Portugal 3-1 to become the first African team to top a FIFA World Cup group. Sadly for the Atlas Lions, their journey would end in the second round at the hands of eventual finalists West Germany, who beat the North Africans 1-0 courtesy of an 88th-minute winner scored by Lothar Matthaus. They would return to compete on the biggest stage in 1994 and 1998, and after missing out on four World Cups, they qualified for Russia 2018 and then Qatar 2022. It was in Qatar that they would make history once more by becoming the first African side to reach a semi-final.



NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES' BEST FIFA WORLD CUP PERFORMANCES

ALGERIA:	**Second round 2014**
EGYPT:	**First round 1934, 1990**
MOROCCO:	**Semi-finals 2022**
TUNISIA:	**First round 1978, 1998, 2002, 2006**

NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES' FIFA WORLD CUP QUALIFICATIONS

ALGERIA:	**4**	**(1982, 1986, 2010, 2014)**
MOROCCO:	**6**	**(1970, 1986, 1994, 1998, 2018, 2022)**
TUNISIA:	**6**	**(1978, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2018, 2022)**
EGYPT:	**3**	**(1934, 1990, 2018)**

NORTH AFRICA: TOP FIFA WORLD CUP GOALSCORERS

Salah Assad	**(Algeria)**	**2**
Youssef En-Nesyri	**(Morocco)**	**3**
Abdelmoumene Djabou	**(Algeria)**	**2**
Abdelrahman Fawzi	**(Egypt)**	**2**
Abdeljalil Hadda	**(Morocco)**	**2**
Abderrazak Khairi	**(Morocco)**	**2**
Mohamed Salah	**(Egypt)**	**2**

NO WAITING GAME

Morocco's 2-1 defeat to Saudi Arabia in 1994 was one of the last two games to be played simultaneously at a FIFA World Cup, without falling on a final match-day of a group. Belgium were beating Holland 1-0 at the same time, with every team in Group F having still one game to play. At later tournaments, every match has been played separately until the climactic two fixtures of any group.

HOMEGROWN HERO

Of the six African countries at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Algeria's was the only squad with an African coach – **Rabah Saadane**, in his fifth separate stint in charge since 1981. He previously led his country to the 1986 FIFA World Cup in Mexico, where they were also eliminated in the first round. Along with Honduras, the Algeria team of 2010 were one of only two countries failing to score a single goal. However, they did concede just twice in their three games: 1-0 defeats to Slovakia and the USA, and a surprise goalless draw with England – Algeria's first-ever FIFA World Cup clean sheet.

MOKHTAR RUNS AMOK

Egypt had to play only two matches to qualify for the 1934 FIFA World Cup, becoming the first African representatives at the tournament. Both games were against a Palestine side under the British mandate – and the Egyptians won both games handsomely, 7-1 in Cairo and 4-1 in Palestine. Captain and striker Mahmoud Mokhtar scored a hat-trick in the first leg, a brace in the second. Turkey were also meant to contest qualifiers against the two sides, but withdrew, leaving the path to the finals free for Egypt.

TUNISIA IN TUNE

Tunisia became the first African team to win a match at a FIFA World Cup finals, when they beat Mexico 3-1 in Rosario, Argentina, in 1978 – thanks to goals from Ali Kaabi, Nejib Ghommidh and Mokhtar Dhouib. While they share with Morocco and Algeria the North African record of reaching four different FIFA World Cups, they are the only nation from that part of the continent to qualify for three finals in a row – in 1998, 2002 and 2006. Among the players to feature in all three tournaments were 2006 captain Riadh Bouazizi, Hatem Trabelsi and **Radhi Jaidi**.



NORTH AFRICA NATIONAL RECORDS

FRENCH CONNECTIONS

Algeria were the only North African country to qualify for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, as Ethiopia, Egypt and Tunisia all fell short in the final play-offs. The Algerians' victory over Burkina Faso gave their Bosnian coach Vahid Halilhodzic the chance to finally manage at a finals, having led the Ivory Coast through qualifying four years earlier only to be fired before the finals. All three Algeria goalscorers against Burkina Faso were born in France but with family connections to Algeria: Sofiane Feghouli, former France U21s captain Carl Medjani and skipper **Madjid Bougherra**.



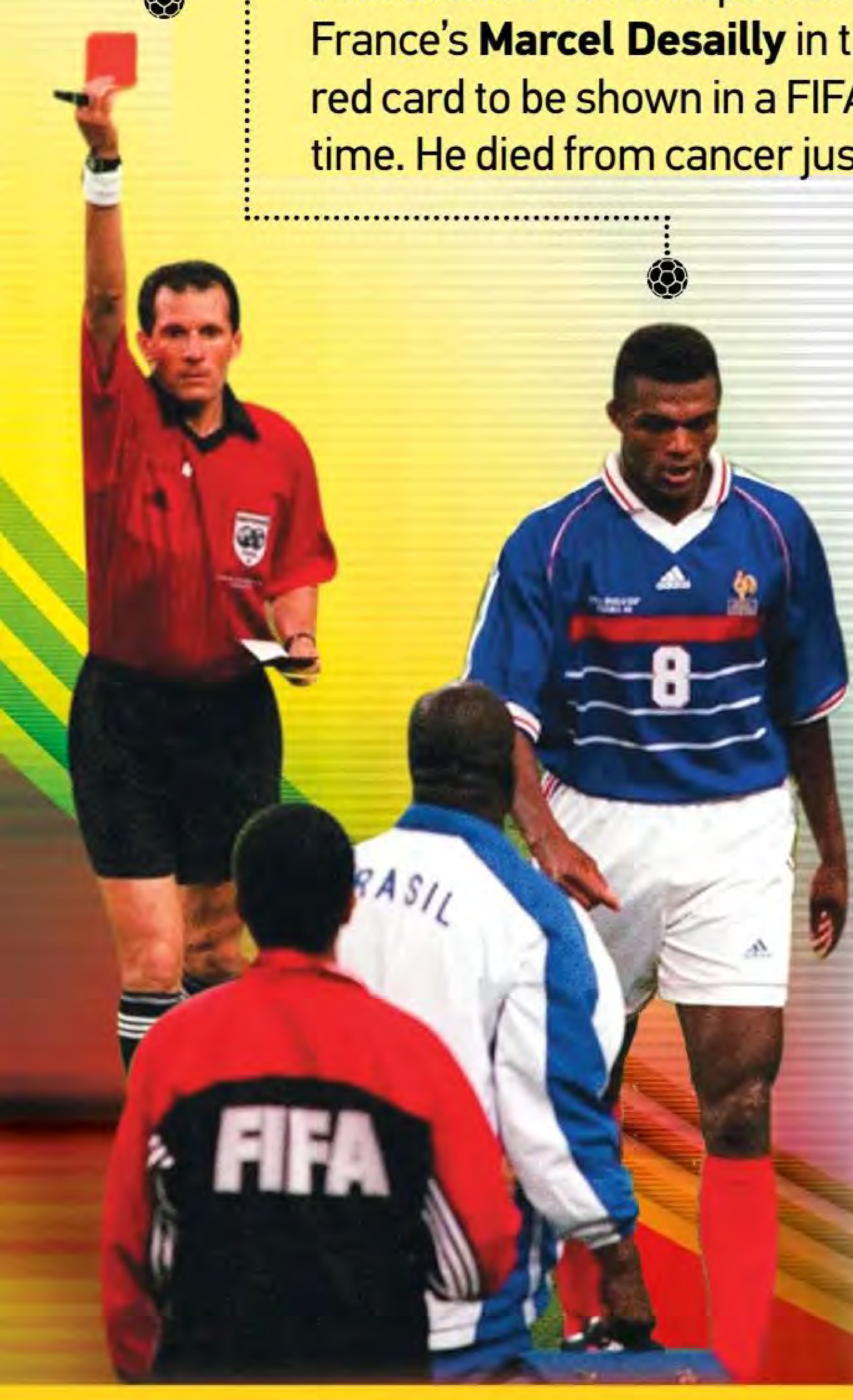
ABOUD AWAKENING

After the political upheaval in Libya in 2011, little was expected of the country's footballers at the 2012 Africa Cup of Nations. Yet they brought some joy to supporters with a surprise 2-1 victory over Senegal in their final first-round match – the first time Libya had ever won an Africa Cup of Nations match outside their own country. Their kit bore the new flag of the country's National Transitional Council. Among the star performers were Ihaab al Boussefi – scorer of both goals against Senegal – and goalkeeper and captain **Samir Aboud**, at 39 the oldest player at the tournament. Libya played their first competitive home game in the capital Tripoli since 2010 when they hosted the Democratic Republic of Congo in a 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifier in June 2013, the game ending in a 0-0 draw.



OFFICIAL INFLUENCE

The first African to referee a FIFA World Cup final was Morocco's **Said Belqola**, who controlled the 1998 climax in which hosts France beat Brazil 3-0. Perhaps his most notable moment was sending off France's **Marcel Desailly** in the 68th minute – brandishing only the third red card to be shown in a FIFA World Cup final. Belqola was 41 at the time. He died from cancer just under four years later.



FOUNDING FATHERS

The Confederation of African Football was officially established at a meeting in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, in the city's Grand Hotel on 7 February 1957 – three days before the first Africa Cup of Nations kicked off in the same city. Representatives of Sudan, South Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt were present at the first assembly, and Egypt's Abdel Aziz Salem became CAF's first president.

SUDAN IMPACT

After two second-place and one third-place finishes, Sudan became the third and last of the Africa Cup of Nations founders to lift the trophy, when they beat Ghana in the 1970 final. Hosts Sudan left it late to reach the final, with two goals from El-Issed – the second 12 minutes into extra-time – seeing off Egypt. The same player scored the only goal of the final, after 12 minutes.

NORTH AFRICA: SELECTED TOP GOALSCORERS

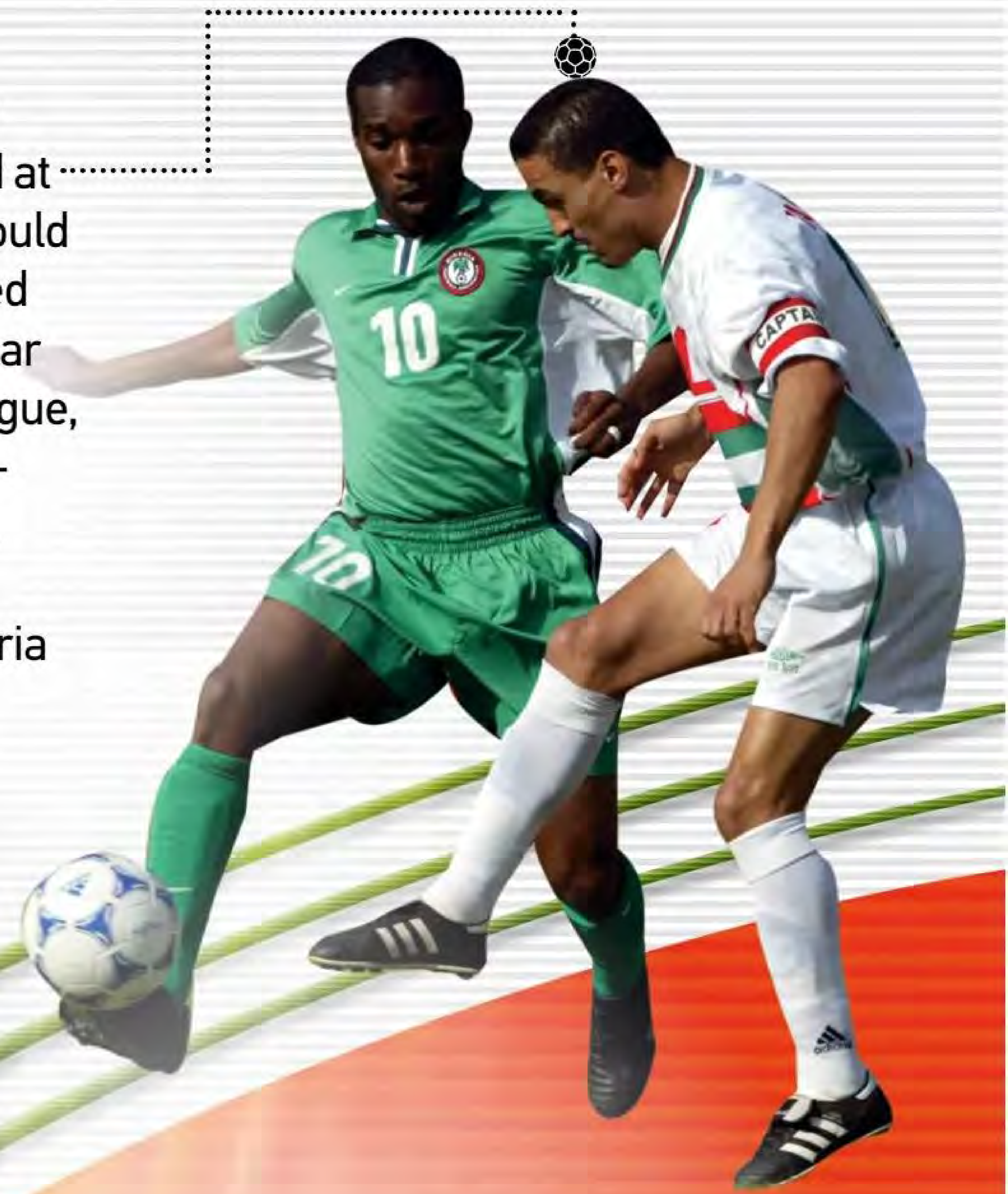
ALGERIA: Islam Slimani	46
EGYPT: Hossam Hassan	69
LIBYA: Ali Al-Biski	35
MOROCCO: Ahmed Faras	36
SUDAN: Nasr El-Din Abbas	27
TUNISIA: Issam Jemaa	36

THE BLACK EAGLES HAVE LANDED

The Confederation of African Football welcomed a new and 54th member state on 10 February 2012, when the newly independent nation of South Sudan created a new team and football association. The "Black Eagles" were not admitted in time to take part in qualifiers for the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations and they failed to make the 2015 or 2017 tournaments, but they have gained admission to FIFA. Football association president Oliver Benjamin said, "We are a country that has just come out of war. We lack even the balls and the T-shirts. Some of our players use their socks, put clothes in them, wrap them up and play with them. That is our love of football."

HEAD-TO-HEAD

The international career of Algeria's leading scorer **Abdelhafid Tasfaout** came to an end at the 2002 Africa Cup of Nations – though it could have been a lot worse. Tasfaout was knocked out by a collision with Mali defender Boubacar Diarra which caused him to swallow his tongue, prompting fears he might not even survive – though, thankfully, he did recover. Tasfaout, who played French league football for six years, scored 34 goals in 79 games for Algeria between 1990 and 2002.



HURRAH FOR SALAH

Egypt have a real star in **Mohamed Salah**. His performances at the London 2012 Olympics helped win him that year's Most Promising Talent award from the African Football Confederation. A week before his 21st birthday in June 2013 he scored a hat-trick against Zimbabwe in a 4-2 FIFA World Cup qualifier win and ended the campaign with six goals. His performances for both country and Swiss club Basel earned him an £11-million move to English Premier League giants Chelsea in January 2014 before later switching to Roma in Serie A. He returned to England in 2017, signing for Liverpool for £36 million. Since his move to Merseyside, Salah has won the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup, scoring 214 goals.



SORE LOSERS

Libya could claim the record for highest-scoring victory by an African side, having racked up a 21-0 lead over Oman during the Arab Nations Cup in April 1966. But the Oman players walked off with 10 minutes remaining, in protest at Libya being awarded a penalty, and played no further part in the competition.

NORTH AFRICA: SELECTED TOP APPEARANCES

ALGERIA: Islam Slimani	**102**
EGYPT: Ahmed Hassan	**184**
LIBYA: Ahmed Saad Osman	**74**
MOROCCO: Noureddine Naybet	**115**
SUDAN: Haitham Mustafa	**98**
TUNISIA: Radhi Jaidi	**105**

STRIKING RIVALS

Gabes-born **Issam Jemaa** made his debut for Tunisia in 2005 and went on to play for the Eagles of Carthage 84 times. He retired in 2014 having scored a record 36 times for Tunisia, a tally that saw him overtake Francileudo Santos. Jemma began his career with Esperance, but from 2005 onwards he played his club football in France, for Lens and Auxerre, before moving to the Middle East in 2013. Brazil-born Santos, by contrast, did not visit Tunisia until his late teens and only accepted citizenship at the age of 24 in 2004. Within weeks he was helping his new nation not only to host but win the 2004 Africa Cup of Nations, scoring four goals including the opener in the final against Morocco. Both Jemaa and Santos were hampered by injury ahead of the 2006 FIFA World Cup – Santos played only 11 minutes at the tournament, while Jemaa missed out all together. He recovered to continue scoring, including the winner against Niger at the 2012 Africa Cup of Nations.



FIFA WORLD CUP SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



MAD FOR 'MADIBA'

Apart from the Dutch and Spanish sides competing in the 2010 FIFA World Cup final, one of the star attractions in Johannesburg's Soccer City stadium on 11 July was South Africa's former president **Nelson Mandela**. The frail 91-year-old – known affectionately by his tribal name of "Madiba" – was driven on to the pitch before the game in a golf cart and given a rapturous reception by the crowd. It marked his one and only public appearance at the tournament. Mandela had hoped to attend the opening ceremony and game on 11 June, but was mourning the death of his 13-year-old great-granddaughter in a car crash the previous evening. He had been a high-profile presence at the FIFA vote in 2004 which awarded South Africa hosting rights for 2010. He sadly passed away in 2013.

GOING FOR A SONG

Two players have been sent off at two separate FIFA World Cups: Cameroon's Rigobert Song, against Brazil in 1994 and Chile four years later, and France's Zinedine Zidane – red-carded against Saudi Arabia in 1998 and against Italy in the 2006 final. Song's red card against Brazil made him the youngest player to be dismissed at a FIFA World Cup – he was just 17 years and 358 days old. Song, born in Nkanglikock on 1 July 1976, is Cameroon's most-capped player, with 137 appearances – including winning displays in the 2000 and 2002 finals of the Africa Cup of Nations. He has been joined in the national team by his nephew, former Arsenal utility player Alexandre Song Billong.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES' BEST FIFA WORLD CUP PERFORMANCES

Country	Best performance
ANGOLA:	First round 2006
CAMEROON:	Quarter-finals 1990
GHANA:	Quarter-finals 2010
IVORY COAST:	First round 2006, 2010, 2014
NIGERIA:	Second round 1994, 1998, 2014
SENEGAL:	Quarter-finals 2002
SOUTH AFRICA:	First round 1998, 2002, 2010
TOGO:	First round 2006
ZAIRE/CONGO DR:	First round 1974

MORE FOR ASAMOAH

Ghana's Asamoah Gyan has scored more FIFA World Cup goals than any other player representing an African nation. He took his overall tally to six with two strikes at the Brazil 2014 FIFA World Cup – putting him one ahead of Cameroon's Roger Milla. He also became the first African to score at three separate FIFA World Cups, and his 11 matches took him level with Cameroon's Francois Omam-Biyik.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES' FIFA WORLD CUP QUALIFICATIONS

Country	Total	Years
CAMEROON:	8	(1982, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2010, 2014, 2022)
NIGERIA:	6	(1994, 1998, 2002, 2010, 2014, 2018)
GHANA:	4	(2006, 2010, 2014, 2022)
SOUTH AFRICA:	3	(1998, 2002, 2010)
IVORY COAST:	3	(2006, 2010, 2014)
SENEGAL:	3	(2002, 2018, 2022)
ANGOLA:	1	(2006)
TOGO:	1	(2006)
ZAIRE/CONGO DR:	1	(1974)

JOLLY ROGER

Cameroon striker **Roger Milla**, famous for dancing around corner flags after each goal, became the FIFA World Cup's oldest scorer against Russia in 1994 – aged 42 years and 39 days. He came on as substitute during that tournament with his surname handwritten, rather than printed, on the back of his shirt. Milla, born in Yaounde on 20 May 1952, had retired from professional football for a year before Cameroon's president, Paul Biya, persuaded him to join the 1990 FIFA World Cup squad. His goals in that tournament helped him win the African Footballer of the Year award for an unprecedented second time – 14 years after he had first received the trophy. He finally ended his international career after the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the United States, finishing with 102 caps and 28 goals to his name.





OH NO, YOBO

Nigeria captain Joseph Yobo set two national records when he played a second-round tie against France at the 2014 FIFA World Cup – yet his late own goal in a 2-0 defeat may make it a match he would rather forget. His appearance that day not only made him the first Nigerian international to reach a century of caps, but also meant he had played 10 FIFA World Cup games – one more than previous national record-holder Jay-Jay Okocha.

RATOMIR GETS IT RIGHT

Ghana went through four different managers during qualifiers for the 2006 FIFA World Cup, with Serbian coach Ratomir Dujkovic finally clinching the country a place at the finals for the very first time. He led them through the whole of 2005 unbeaten, winning a FIFA prize for being the most-improved team of the year. Ghana were the only African country to make it through the first round of both the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups, despite having the youngest average age of any squad each time. They were again coached by a Serb in 2010, this time Milovan Rajevac.

BROTHERS AT ARMS

The Boateng brothers made FIFA World Cup history in playing against each other at the 2010 finals in South Africa. Both were also selected for the 'replay' in 2014. In 2010 Jerome played left-back for Germany while elder half-brother **Kevin-Prince**, who had switched nationalities a month earlier, was in the Ghana midfield. In the group match in 2010 Jerome Boateng switched to right-back. Germany won 1-0 in South Africa while the return in Brazil ended up 2-2. Kevin-Prince was the only brother to play a full 90 minutes, in South Africa. He was substituted during the game in Brazil while Jerome was replaced during both games. In the total 180 minutes they were on the pitch together for 'only' 117 minutes.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES: TOP FIFA WORLD CUP GOALSCORERS

Asamoah Gyan (Ghana) 6
Roger Milla (Cameroon) 5
Papa Bouba Diop (Senegal) 3
Samuel Eto'o (Cameroon) 3
Daniel Amokachi (Nigeria) 2
Emmanuel Amunike (Nigeria) 2
Andre Ayew (Ghana) 2
Shaun Bartlett (South Africa) 2
Wilfried Bony (Ivory Coast) 2
Henri Camara (Senegal) 2
Aruna Dindane (Ivory Coast) 2
Didier Drogba (Ivory Coast) 2
Gervinho (Ivory Coast) 2
Patrick Mboma (Cameroon) 2
Benni McCarthy (South Africa) 2
Sulley Muntari (Ghana) 2
Ahmed Musa (Nigeria) 4
Francois Omam-Biyik (Cameroon) 2



KESHI JOB

Nigeria's Stephen Keshi became the first African manager to reach the knock-out stages of a FIFA World Cup when he steered his country through Group F at the 2014 tournament in Brazil. The feat also meant Nigeria were the first African country to reach the second round of three separate FIFA World Cups, having previously done so in 1994 – when Keshi was in the team – and 1998. He announced his resignation after their second-round 2-0 defeat to France, which came despite one of several brave displays by goalkeeper **Vincent Enyeama**.



THE FOURMOST

The only two African footballers to play at four FIFA World Cups – and the only three to be named in the squads for four – are all from Cameroon. Striker Samuel Eto'o became the latest in 2014, after playing in 1998, 2002 and 2010. He emulated defender Rigobert Song, who was in the Cameroon team in 1994, 1998, 2002 and 2010. Goalkeeper Jacques Songo'o was named in the country's squads for the four FIFA World Cups between 1990 and 2002, but he only actually played in the 1994 and 1998 versions.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA NATIONAL RECORDS

HOT DROG

Didier Drogba may have been raised in France but he was born in Ivory Coast and remains one of the African country's favourite sons for his actions both on and off the pitch. The Ivory Coast captain scored a record 65 goals in 105 appearances for the Elephants. He has been credited with influence off the pitch, too, when he called for a ceasefire in the civil war-torn nation. He also pushed for an Africa Cup of Nations qualifier against Madagascar in June 2007 to be moved from the capital Abidjan to rebel army stronghold Bouake in an effort to encourage reconciliation. Drogba, a two-time CAF African Footballer of the Year, captained the Ivory Coast team at the three FIFA World Cups they have reached, in 2006, 2010 and 2014.







SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: SELECTED TOP GOALSCORERS

Country: Player	Goals
ANGOLA: Akwa	39
BOTSWANA: Jerome Ramatlhakwane	24
CAMEROON: Samuel Eto'o	56
GHANA: Asamoah Gyan	51
IVORY COAST: Didier Drogba	65
NIGERIA: Rashidi Yekini	37
SENEGAL: Sadio Mane	44
SOUTH AFRICA: Benni McCarthy	31
TOGO: Emmanuel Adebayor	32
ZAMBIA: Godfrey Chitalu	79
ZIMBABWE: Peter Ndlovu	37

KNOCKED OUT ON PENALTIES

Botswana goalkeeper and captain Modiri Marumo was sent off in the middle of a penalty shootout against Malawi in May 2003 after punching the opposing goalkeeper Philip Nyasulu in the face. Botswana defender Michael Mogaladi had to go in goal for the rest of the shootout, which Malawi won 4-1.

FIFTEEN LOVE

Fifteen-year-old Samuel Kuffour became the youngest footballer to win an Olympic medal when Ghana took bronze at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona – 27 days before his 16th birthday.

EAGLETS SOAR

The first African country to win an official FIFA tournament was Nigeria, when their "Golden Eaglets" beat Germany 2-0 in the final of the 1985 World Under-17 Championships.

SO LONG, PITSO

South Africa went through four different foreign coaches – in five separate spells – between 2004 and 2010, when they hosted the World Cup, before the top job eventually went to South African Pitso Mosimane. He had previously won four caps as a player, then assisted Brazilian Carlos Alberto Parreira at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Mosimane's first nine games in charge brought six wins, two draws and just one defeat, but he lost the post in 2012 after a winless nine-game streak cost South Africa the chance of competing at the 2014 FIFA World Cup and was replaced by Gordon Igesund.

GENEROUS GEORGE

In 1995 Liberia's George Weah became the first African to be named FIFA World Player of the Year, an award that recognized his prolific goalscoring exploits for Paris Saint-Germain and AC Milan. That same year he added the European Footballer of the Year and African Footballer of the Year prizes to his collection. Weah not only captained his country, but often funded the team's travels – though he remains the only FIFA World Player of the Year whose country has never qualified for a FIFA World Cup. After retiring in 2003 after 60 caps and 22 international goals, he moved into politics and ran unsuccessfully for the Liberian presidency in 2005.

SUPER FRED

In 2007, **Frederic Kanoute** became the first non-African-born player to be named African Footballer of the Year. The striker was born in Lyon, France, and played for France U-21s. But the son of a French mother and Malian father opted to play for Mali in 2004, scoring 23 goals in 37 appearances before retiring from international football after the 2010 Africa Cup of Nations. As well as going down in history as one of Mali's greatest-ever players, he is also a hero to fans of Spanish side CF Sevilla, for whom he scored 143 goals, winning two UEFA Cups along the way. Only three men have scored more goals for the club.





SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: SELECTED TOP APPEARANCES

Country: Player	Appearances
ANGOLA: Flavio	91
BOTSWANA: Joel Mogorosi	92
CAMEROON: Rigobert Song	137
GHANA: Andre Ayew	120
IVORY COAST: Didier Zokora	123
NIGERIA: Ahmed Musa	109
SENEGAL: Idrissa Gueye	115
SOUTH AFRICA: Aaron Mokoena	107
TOGO: Abdoul-Gafar Mamah	93
ZAMBIA: Kennedy Mweene	122
ZIMBABWE: Peter Ndlovu	81

DRAMATIC TURNAROUNDS

Ghana managed to concede three goals in a minute to world champions Germany in an April 1993 friendly. Ghana had been 1-0 up with 20 minutes left, before losing the game 6-1. In the 1989 FIFA World Youth Championships, Nigeria were 4-0 down with 25 minutes left in their quarter-final against the Soviet Union, but hit back to draw 4-4 before winning 5-3 on penalties.

MAESTRO'S MEMORIALS

Didier Zokora, the Ivory Coast's most-capped player, bears several tattoos cherishing members of his family – chiefly his tragic younger brother Armand, whose name is inked on Didier's right forearm. The duo had both just signed professional contracts with local side ASEC Mimosas when Armand drowned off a beach in 1997 at the age of 14. On his left forearm Zokora – himself nicknamed "Maestro" – has the names of his children, Sarah and Nadya, while a tattoo of his wife, Mariam, is just above his heart. Zokora has scored just once in 123 international appearances, in a 4-0 FIFA World Cup qualifier victory over Botswana in June 2008.



REMEMBERING MANDELA

The world of football united in paying tribute to one of the game's greatest fans, when former South African president and anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela died aged 94 on 5 December 2013. His final public appearance had been at the 2010 FIFA World Cup final, when he and wife Graca Machel were driven around the pitch and given a rapturous reception by the crowd. Mandela – known affectionately by his tribal name of 'Madiba' – had played a crucial role in convincing FIFA to award the 2010 hosting rights to South Africa. He had often spoken of how, when imprisoned on Robben Island, he and fellow inmates kept their spirits up by playing football. He recalled: "The only access to the World Cup was on radio. Football was the only joy to prisoners." Former South Africa captain Lucas Radebe described Mandela as "my hero", David Beckham said meeting him was "the highlight of my career" and Pele called him "one of the most influential people in my life". The week of Mandela's death, every UEFA Champions League game began with the unfurling of 12m by 2m banners proclaiming: "Madiba, the world will never forget you."

ASIA & OCEANIA

Asia wrote a major chapter in football history in 2002 when Japan and South Korea became the FIFA World Cup's first co-hosts and the Koreans produced Asia's best-ever finish of fourth. Asia's World Cup strength improved when Australia moved from Oceania in 2006. However, the 2014 and 2018 FIFA World Cups were depressing for the Asian region, with only Japan reaching the knockout stage in the latter tournament. However, their was a notable improvement in Qatar in 2022, where Australia, Japan and South Korea all made it to Round of 16.



Japan were thrilling to watch in Qatar. The Blue Samurai defeated both Germany and Spain 2-1 and pushed Croatia all the way in a tense knockout clash that saw Japan narrowly losing out on penalties.


日本

AUSTRALIA

Victims, perhaps, of an overcomplicated qualifying system that has limited the country's FIFA World Cup finals appearances, and hampered by its geographical isolation that, in the early years, saw other sports prosper in the country at football's expense, it has taken many years for Australia to establish itself on the world football map. However, driven by a new generation of players, many based with top European clubs, the Socceroos delivered for the first time at the 2006 FIFA World Cup and won their first AFC Asian Cup in 2015. In 2022 they reached the last 16 in Qatar, and in 2023 Australia co-hosted the women's World Cup, where the Matildas finished fourth.



NATIVE HERO

Harry Williams holds a proud place in Australian football history as the first Aboriginal player to represent the country in internationals. He made his debut in 1970 and was part of the first Australian squad to compete at a FIFA World Cup finals, in West Germany in 1974.



AUSTRALIA RECORDS

Honours: Oceania champions 1980, 1996, 2000, 2004
AFC Asian Cup champions 2015
First international: v New Zealand (lost 3-1), Auckland, 17 June 1922
Biggest win: 31-0 v American Samoa, Coffs Harbour, 11 April 2001
Biggest defeat: 8-0 v South Africa, Adelaide, Australia, 17 September 1955

MOMENTOUS MORI

Damian Mori's then-Australian record tally of 29 goals, in just 45 internationals, included no fewer than five hat-tricks: trebles against Fiji and Tahiti, four-goal hauls against the Cook Islands and Tonga, and five in Australia's 13-0 trouncing of the Solomon Islands in a 1998 FIFA World Cup qualifier. His international career spanned from 1992 to 2002, but he never played in a FIFA World Cup finals as Australia didn't qualify. He did, though, claim a world record for scoring the fastest goal – after just 3.69 seconds for his club side Adelaide City against Sydney United in 1996.



NEILL APPEAL

Tough-tackling Australia veteran **Lucas Neill** had to wait until his 91st international appearance before scoring his first goal for his country: the final strike in a 4-0 victory over Jordan in June 2013 that boosted their chances of reaching the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Qualification was clinched in the next game, thanks to a lone goal by Josh Kennedy to defeat Iraq – making Australia the third team, after hosts Brazil and Japan, to secure a place at the finals. Former Blackburn Rovers, West Ham United and Galatasary defender Neill made his Australia debut in October 1996, becoming the country's third-youngest international. His scoring record, though, pales alongside that of fellow centre-back Robbie Cornthwaite, his goal against Romania in February 2013 was his third in his first six games for Australia.

TOP CAPS

1	Mark Schwarzer	109
2	Tim Cahill	108
3	Lucas Neill	96
4	Brett Emerton	95
=	Matthew Ryan	95
6	Alex Tobin	87
7	Paul Wade	84
=	Mark Bresciano	84
9	Luke Wilkshire	80
=	Mark Milligan	80





CAHILL MAKES HISTORY

Tim Cahill scored the Socceroos' first ever FIFA World Cup Goals, netting in the 84th (and 89th) minutes of a comeback 3-1 win over Japan in 2006. His most spectacular goal was his last, a first-time volley in a 3-2 defeat to the Netherlands in 2014. Sadly for Cahill, he later received his second yellow card of the finals and so missed Australia's final match. He scored twice in 2006, once in 2010 – and received a red card in Australia's opening game – and twice in 2014. Australia's other FIFA World Cup finals scorers are Mile Jedinak (three), Brett Holman (two), John Aloisi, Craig Moore, Harry Kewell, Craig Goodwin, Mitchell Duke and Mathew Leckie (all one).

AUSTRALIA'S SHOOT-OUT RECORD

Australia are the only team to reach the FIFA World Cup finals via a penalty shoot-out – in the final qualifying play-off in November 2005. They had lost the first leg 1-0 to Uruguay in Montevideo. Mark Bresciano's goal levelled the aggregate score, which remained 1-1 after extra-time. Goalkeeper **Mark Schwarzer** made two crucial saves as Australia won the shoot-out 4-2, with John Aloisi scoring the winning spot-kick. Schwarzer passed Alex Tobin to become Australia's most-capped footballer with his 88th appearance, in January 2011, in the AFC Asian Cup final defeat to Japan. Tobin had been in defence when Schwarzer made his Australia debut against Canada in 1993.

BET ON BRETT

Brett Holman's goal against Ghana, in a 1-1 draw at the 2010 tournament, made him Australia's youngest marksman at a FIFA World Cup. He was 26 years 84 days old at the time, 105 days younger than Tim Cahill had been when striking against Japan in 2006. Holman added to his tally five days later, when Australia beat Serbia 2-1. Cahill himself was also on the scoresheet, though goal difference meant Australia failed to reach the second round.

COME TO A LAND DOWN UNDER

After reaching the quarter-finals of their first AFC Asian Cup in 2007 and finishing runners-up to Japan four years later, Australia made it third time lucky at the 2015 tournament – beating South Korea 2-1 after extra time. The Koreans had scored a dramatic equalizer in stoppage time forcing the Australians to dig deep to win their first title.



TOP SCORERS

1	Tim Cahill	50
2	Damian Mori	29
3	Archie Thompson	28
4	John Aloisi	27
5	Attila Abonyi	25
=	John Kosima	25
7	Brett Emerton	20
=	David Zdrilic	20
=	Mile Jedinak	20
10	Graham Arnold	19

THREE-CARD TRICK

Graham Poll, in 2006, was not the first referee at a FIFA World Cup to show the same player three yellow cards. It happened in another game involving Australia, when their English-born midfielder Ray Richards was belatedly sent off against Chile at the 1974 FIFA World Cup. Reserve official Clive Thomas, from Wales, informed Iranian referee Jafar Namdar he had booked Richards three times without dismissing him. Richards played four unwarranted minutes before eventually receiving his marching orders.

PRECEDENT KENNEDY

Australian newspapers acclaimed a player nicknamed 'Jesus' as their 'saviour' when Josh Kennedy's 83rd-minute goal against Iraq in June 2013 clinched a place at the 2014 FIFA World Cup for his country – ensuring a third consecutive appearance at the finals. Lofty striker Kennedy, given the nickname for his former styling of long hair and a beard, had entered the field just six minutes earlier as a replacement for Tim Cahill. It was his 16th – and most significant – goal in 30 appearances for Australia.

KEWELL THE TOPS

Harry Kewell (born on 22 September 1978) is widely regarded as Australia's best-ever player. The left winger scored 17 goals in 56 international appearances, including the equalizer against Croatia that took Australia to the last 16 of the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals. Kewell enjoyed a successful club career with Leeds United, Liverpool and Galatasaray. He is also the only Australian-born player to gain a Champions League winner's medal, with Liverpool in 2005. He endured an unhappier time at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, when he lasted just 22 minutes before being red-carded for handball against Ghana – the 150th sending-off in the history of the finals.



JAPAN

The past two decades have seen great breakthroughs for Japanese football. Until the first professional league was introduced in 1993, clubs had been amateur and football was overshadowed in Japan's affections by other sports such as baseball, martial arts, table tennis and golf. Even more significantly, Japan co-hosted the 2002 FIFA World Cup – where the team reached the second round for the first time. They repeated the feat in 2010, 2018 and 2022, pushing pre-tournament favourites Belgium all the way in a 3-2 defeat in Russia and then losing on penalties to eventual semi-finalists Croatia in Qatar.

TOP SCORERS

1	Kunishige Kamamoto	75
2	Kazuyoshi Miura	55
3	Shinji Okazaki	50
4	Hiromi Hara	37
=	Keisuke Honda	37
6	Shinji Kagawa	31
7	Takuya Takagi	27
8	Kazushi Kimura	26
9	Yuya Osako	25
10	Shunsuke Nakamura	24



NAKATA BLAZES THE TRAIL

Hidetoshi Nakata ranks among Japan's best-ever players. The midfielder set up all three goals in a 3-2 FIFA World Cup qualifying play-off win over Iran in November 1997. Nakata moved to Perugia in Italy after the 1998 finals, becoming the first Japanese player to star in Europe, and won a Serie A championship medal with Roma in 2001. He was followed abroad by international team-mates such as Shinji Ono, who joined Feyenoord in the Netherlands, and midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura, whose European employers included Reggina in Italy, Celtic in Scotland and Espanyol in Spain. Nakata started in three FIFA World Cup finals tournaments, making ten appearances and scoring one goal – the second in a 2-0 win over Tunisia that took Japan to the last 16 in 2002. Nakata won 77 caps and scored 11 goals, before surprisingly retiring from all forms of football after the 2006 FIFA World Cup, aged just 29.

POLITICAL FOOTBALL

Japan were surprise bronze medallists in the football tournament at the 1968 summer Olympics in Mexico City, and star striker **Kunishige Kamamoto** finished top scorer overall with seven goals. He remains Japan's all-time leading scorer, with 80 goals in 84 matches. Since retirement, he has combined coaching with being elected to Japan's parliament and serving as vice-president of the country's football association.

HONDA INSPIRES

After hosts Brazil, Japan were the first country to qualify for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, after Keisuke Honda's late penalty secured a 1-1 draw with Australia in June 2013. Honda had previously won two man-of-the-match awards at the 2010 FIFA World Cup and was named player of the tournament when Japan, under Italian-born coach Alberto Zaccheroni, won the 2011 AFC Asian Cup. He scored Japan's first goal at the 2014 finals, against Ivory Coast, but they lost 2-1 and exited the tournament after two defeats and a draw, prompting Zaccheroni's resignation. Honda was the first Japanese player to score at two FIFA World Cups and the first to reach three goals.

TOP CAPS

1	Yasuhito Endo	152
2	Yuto Nagatomo	142
3	Maya Yoshida	126
4	Masami Ihara	122
5	Shinji Okazaki	119
6	Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi	116
7	Makoto Hasebe	114
8	Yuji Nakazawa	110
9	Shunsuke Nakamura	98
=	Keisuke Honda	98



SUCKER PUNCHED

Japan were the standout Asian team at the 2018 FIFA World Cup, making it through the group stage before losing to eventual semi-finalists Belgium in the Round of 16. They finished second in their group behind Colombia in the first round, who they beat 2-1 in their opening fixture. They followed that impressive result with a 2-2 draw with Senegal before losing 1-0 to Poland. Japan were then very unfortunate to lose to the heavily fancied Belgians. Having raced into a 2-0 lead, Japan were pegged back to 2-2. With the clock running down Japan probed for a final opportunity only to be hit on the counter-attack with an injury-time winner for Belgium.

THREE AND IN

Japan's 3-1 Group E victory over Denmark in Bloemfontein at the 2010 FIFA World Cup made them the first Asian side to score three times in one FIFA World Cup match since North Korea's 5-3 defeat to Portugal in their 1966 quarter-final. Japan's goals came from Keisuke Honda, Yasuhito Endo and Shinji Okazaki. Honda and Endo both scored directly from free-kicks, the first time a team has managed such a double in one FIFA World Cup game since Yugoslavia hit three when beating Zaire 9-0 in 1974. Endo has gone on to become Japan's most-capped player, surpassing Masami Ihara's tally by appearing in an October 2012 friendly against Brazil.



SHINJI BENEFITS

Playmaker **Shinji Kagawa** became the first Japanese footballer to be part of an English league championship-winning side when he helped Manchester United secure the Premier League title in 2012-13 – 12 months after helping his former club Borussia Dortmund win the Bundesliga in Germany. Kagawa was named 2012 AFC International Player of the Year. Yet he suffered for his art during Japan's triumphant 2011 AFC Asian Cup campaign, scoring twice in their victorious quarter-final but breaking his foot in the next game and thus missing the final.



TA-DA, TADANARI

The goalscoring hero whose extra-time strike clinched a record fourth AFC Asian Cup for Japan in 2011 was a man who had not even played for his country before the tournament began. Striker Tadanari Lee made his international debut in the first-round match against Jordan – and conjured perfect timing for his first Japan goal, with 11 minutes of extra-time left in the final against Australia. His midfield team-mate **Keisuke Honda** took the prize for the event's most valuable player, while forward Shinji Okazaki's first-round hat-trick against Saudi Arabia helped earn him a place in the team of the tournament.

JAPANESE GOAL GLUT

No team have scored more goals in one AFC Asian Cup tournament than Japan's 21 in six games on their way to winning the title for the second time, in Lebanon in 2000 – though the final against Saudi Arabia was settled with just a single goal, by Shigeyoshi Mochizuki. Nine different players scored for Japan during the tournament – including Akinori Nishizawa and Naohiro Takahara, who each managed five – while their team-mate Ryuzo Morioka scored once in his own net. Japan's most emphatic victory of the tournament came in the first round, 8-1 against Uzbekistan, with both Nishizawa and Takahara hitting hat-tricks.

SOUTH KOREA

"Be the Reds!" was the rallying cry of South Korea's fervent fans as they co-hosted the 2002 FIFA World Cup – and saw their energetic team become the first Asian side to reach the semi-finals, ultimately finishing fourth. South Korea also won the AFC Asian Cup the first two times it was staged (in 1956 and 1960). South Korea could well claim to be the continent's leading football side, even if AFC Asian Cup triumphs have been thin on the ground since then. The country's professional K-League is making progress and South Korean teams have won the Asian club championship 12 times.





HWANG'S THE MAN

A rare veteran among South Korea's young guns at the 2002 FIFA World Cup was 33-year-old **Hwang Sun-Hong**, after Cha Bum-Kun the only other player to score a half-century of goals for the country. His 50th goal came in the 2-0 win over Poland that clinched South Korea's place in the second round. Hwang had also played in the 1990 and 1994 FIFA World Cups, but missed the 1998 event through injury. Eight of Hwang's goals came in one game, an 11-0 crushing of Nepal in October 1994. South Korea's record victory was also against poor Nepal, in September 2003 – this time ending 16-0, with five for Park Jin-Sub and three apiece for Woo Sung-Yong and Kim Do-Hoon.

HERE COMES THE SON

South Korea have played more FIFA World Cup finals matches than any other Asian team, taking their tally to 34 with three games in 2018, including a stunning 2-0 win over holders Germany. However, they ultimately finished third in Group F and thereby failed to reach the Round of 16. Only twice has South Korea made it past the first round and their overall record is six wins, nine draws and 19 defeats. Their 30th game, which fell on 22 June 2014, a 4-2 defeat to Algeria, was an unhappier outcome than their two previous matches on the same date: a penalty shootout victory over Spain in a 2002 quarter-final and a 2-2 group-stage draw with Nigeria eight years later. South Korea's second goal against Algeria was scored by now-Tottenham Hotspur striker **Son Heung-Min**. His father, Son Woong-Chun, a former international footballer, had unsuccessfully urged coaches during qualifying to leave his son out of the team and allow him more time to develop as a player.



SPIDER CATCHER

Goalkeeper **Lee Woon-Jae** – nicknamed "Spider Hands" – made himself a national hero by making the crucial penalty save that took co-hosts South Korea into the semi-finals of the 2002 FIFA World Cup. He blocked Spain's fourth spot-kick, taken by winger Joaquin, in a quarter-final shoot-out. Lee, who also played in the 1994, 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups, provided more penalty saves at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup – stopping three spot-kicks in shoot-outs on South Korea's way to third place. Lee's form restricted his frequent back-up, Kim Byung-Ji, to just 62 international appearances. But Kim did at least set a new South Korean top-flight landmark of 200 clean sheets in June 2012, at the age of 42.

PARK LIFE

The tirelessly-energetic midfielder **Park Ji-Sung** can claim to be the most successful Asian footballer of all time. He became the first Asian player to lift the UEFA Champions League trophy when his club Manchester United beat Chelsea in 2008, despite missing the final. He also became the first Asian footballer to score at three successive FIFA World Cups – beginning on home turf in 2002, when his goal broke the deadlock in a first-round game against Portugal, putting South Korea through to the knock-out stages for the first time ever. International team-mate Ahn Jung-Hwan and Saudi Arabia's Sami Al-Jaber are the only other Asian footballers to have scored three FIFA World Cup goals. Park became the eighth South Korean to reach a century of caps when he captained the side in their 2011 AFC Asian Cup semi-final defeat to Japan, before announcing his international retirement to allow a younger generation to emerge.





TOP CAPS

1	Cha Bum-kun	136
=	Hong Myung-bo	136
3	Lee Woon-jae	133
4	Son Heung-min	129
5	Lee Young-pyo	127
6	Kim Ho-kon	124
7	Yoo Sang-chul	122
8	Cho Young-jeung	113
9	Kim Young-gwon	112
10	Ki Sung-yueng	110

TOP SCORERS

1	Cha Bum-Kun	58
2	Hwang Sun-Hong	50
3	Son Heung-min	37
4	Park Lee-Chun	36
5	Kim Jae-Han	33
=	Lee Dong-Gook	33
7	Choi Soon-Ho	30
8	Kim Do-Hoon	29
=	Huh Jung-Moo	29
10	Choi Yong-Soo	27

HONG SETS FIFA WORLD CUP RECORD

South Korea defender **Hong Myung-Bo** was the first Asian footballer to appear in four consecutive FIFA World Cup finals tournaments. He played all three games as South Korea lost to Belgium, Spain and Uruguay in 1990. He scored twice in three appearances in 1994 – his goal against Spain sparking a Korean fightback from 2-0 down to draw 2-2. In 1998 he started all three group games as South Korea were eliminated at the group stage. Four years later, on home soil, he captained South Korea to fourth place in the finals and was voted third-best player of the tournament. Hong coached South Korea's U-23 side to Olympic bronze at the 2012 Summer Games – beating Japan 2-0 in the medal play-off. Those goals were scored by Arsenal's Park Chu-Young and WfL Wolfsburg Koo Ja-Cheol. Hong became South Korea manager in June 2013, and was in charge of the team at the 2014 FIFA World Cup, where one group game pitted him against Belgium and their coach Marc Wilmots – the pair having played against each other at the 1998 finals.

CHA BOOM AND BUST

Even before South Korea made their FIFA World Cup breakthrough under Guus Hiddink, the country had a homegrown hero of world renown – thunderous striker **Cha Bum-Kun**, known for his fierce shots and suitable nickname "Cha Boom". He helped pave the way for more Asian players to make their name in Europe by signing for German club Eintracht Frankfurt in 1979 and later played for Bundesliga rivals Bayer Leverkusen. His achievements in Germany included two UEFA Cup triumphs – with Frankfurt in 1980 and with Leverkusen eight years later – while his performances helped make him a childhood idol for future German internationals such as Jurgen Klinsmann and Michael Ballack. His record 55 goals for the national team, in 121 appearances, included a seven-minute hat-trick against Malaysia in the 1977 Park's Cup tournament – levelling the score after South Korea had been trailing 4-1. "Cha Boom" later served as national coach, winning 22, losing 11 and drawing eight during his time in charge between January 1997 and June 1998 – but there was an unhappy ending when he was sacked two games into the 1998 FIFA World Cup, after South Korea's 5-0 defeat to the Netherlands.



OTHER ASIAN COUNTRIES

The lesser-known Asian footballing nations represent the true backwaters of world football. These may well be the countries in which true football obsession has yet to take hold, but competition between, and achievements by, these teams are no less vibrant.





SAUDIS MAKE FLYING START

Saudi Arabia reached the last 16 in their first FIFA World Cup finals appearance in 1994. **Saeed Owairan**'s winner against Belgium enabled them to finish level on points with the Netherlands in Group F. After the Saudis lost their opening game 2-1 to the Dutch, Sami Al-Jaber and Fuad Amin then scored in a 2-1 win over Morocco before they lost 3-1 to Sweden in the last 16. Substitute Fahad Al-Ghesheyan scored in the 85th minute after the Swedes led 2-0. Kennet Andersson grabbed Sweden's decisive third goal three minutes later. The Saudis have failed to advance beyond the group stages in their three subsequent appearances.

IRAN TOP SCORERS

1	Ali Daei	108
2	Sardar Azmoun	53
3	Mehdi Taremi	51
4	Karim Bagheri	50
5	Javad Nekounam	38
=	Ali Karimi	38
7	Karim Ansariford	30
8	Gholam Hossein Mazloumi	19
9	Farshad Pious	18
10	Reza Ghoochannejhad	17

NEK'S THE NEXT IN LINE

Iran midfielder Javad Nekounam is second behind striker Ali Daei in matches as captain, but overtook his compatriot in total caps won. He led Iran 56 times in 149 games, compared to 148-cap Daei's 80 as skipper.

EHSAN OUT FRONT

Only nine Iran players have made six or more FIFA World Cup appearances, with Ehsan Hajsafi leading the way on nine after playing at the 2014, 2018 and 2022 tournaments.

IRAN'S WINNING RUN

Iran won all 13 matches across their hat-trick of AFC Asian Cup triumphs in 1968, 1972 and 1976 – and their 8-0 win over South Yemen in 1976 remains a tournament record. Among the players who enjoyed repeat success was Homayoun Behzadi, who scored in all four games in 1968 and was again on the winning side four years later. Iran's manager in 1976 was Heshmat Mohajerani, who also led the team to the quarter-finals of that year's Summer Olympics in Montreal before steering Iran to their first-ever FIFA World Cup appearance in 1978. Iran's captain at the tournament in Argentina was midfielder Ali Parvin – who had scored the only goal of the 1976 AFC Asian Cup final against Kuwait.

RANK OUTSIDERS

North Korea only narrowly lost their first game of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, 2-1 to Brazil – **Ji Yun-Nam** scoring late on for the Koreans. The match was between the tournament's highest- and lowest-ranked qualifying teams. Brazil were in first place in the FIFA rankings, while North Korea were 105th.



IRAN TOP CAPS

1	Javad Nekounam	149
2	Ali Daei	148
3	Ehsan Hajsafi	142
4	Ali Karimi	127
5	Jalal Hosseini	115
6	Mehdi Mahdavikia	110
7	Karim Ansariford	104
8	Andranik Taymourian	101
9	Karim Bagheri	87
=	Mehdi Taremi	87

APPEARANCES IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS

Iran	6 (1978, 1998, 2006, 2014, 2018, 2022)
Saudi Arabia	5 (1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2022)
New Zealand	2 (1982*, 2010*)
North Korea	2 (1966, 2010)
China	1 (2002)
Indonesia**	1 (1938)
Iraq	1 (1986)
Israel	1 (1970)
Kuwait	1 (1982)
United Arab Emirates	1 (1990)

* Qualified for FIFA World Cup as Oceania Confederation member
** Played in the 1938 FIFA World Cup as Dutch East Indies

SHAKEN SHEIKH

Kuwait have qualified for the FIFA World Cup just once, in 1982 – though they made a memorable appearance when they almost walked off the field in protest at a decision. Kuwait's chief Olympic official, Sheikh Fahad Al-Ahmed, even stomped on to the pitch in Valladolid, Spain, when France's Alain Giresse scored a goal that would have given Les Bleus a 4-1 lead. The Kuwaitis claimed they had heard a whistle and stopped playing and ultimately convinced referee Myroslav Stupar to disallow the strike. The game still finished 4-1 to France, though, and Kuwait were eliminated in the first round.

CHINA YET TO REALISE POTENTIAL

China, the world's second- most populous nation, have qualified just once for the FIFA World Cup finals, in 2002. They topped their final qualifying group by eight points, but coach Bora Milutinovic's team slumped in the finals, failing to score a goal in defeats by Costa Rica (2-0), Brazil (4-0) and Turkey (3-0). Their 2002 side included record caps-holder **Li Weifeng** (112 appearances) and all-time leading scorer Hao Haidong (39 goals).



IRAN STOP AT 19

Iran hold the record for the highest score in an Asian zone FIFA World Cup qualifier. They thrashed Guam 19-0 in Tabriz on 24 November 2000. Karim Bagheri scored six goals and Ali Karimi four. Future national coach Ali Daei and Farhad Majidi both netted three. This was two goals better than Iran's previous highest qualifying win – 17-0 against the Maldives on 2 June 1997, during which Bagheri scored seven times. Two days after their 19-goal thrashing, Guam crashed 16-0 to Tajikistan.

PALESTINE THE PIONEERS

Palestine, then under British rule, were the first Asian team to enter the FIFA World Cup qualifiers. They lost 7-1 away to Egypt on 16 March 1934. They lost the return match at home on 6 April, 4-1. Four years later, they were eliminated by Greece, who won 3-1 in Tel Aviv and 1-0 at home.

WORLD'S WORST

On the same day that Brazil and Germany contested the FIFA World Cup final on 30 June 2002, the two lowest-ranked FIFA countries were also taking each other on. Asian side Bhutan ran out 4-0 winners over CONCACAF's Montserrat, in a match staged in the Bhutan capital Thimphu. The winning side's captain, striker Wangay Dorji, scored a hat-trick.



IRAQ AND ROLL

One of the greatest – and most heart-warming – surprises of recent international football was Iraq's unexpected triumph at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup, barely a year after the end of the war that ravaged the country and forced them to play "home" games elsewhere. Despite disrupted preparations, they eliminated Vietnam and South Korea on the way to the 2007 final in which captain **Younis Mahmoud**'s goal proved decisive against Saudi Arabia. They were unable to retain their title four years later, losing to Australia in the quarter-finals. Mahmoud retired from international football in March 2014, ending his Iraq career with 50 goals in 124 matches – second in both categories – behind only Hussein Saeed, who scored 61 goals in 126 appearances between 1977 and 1990.

AL-DEAYEA CAPS THEM ALL

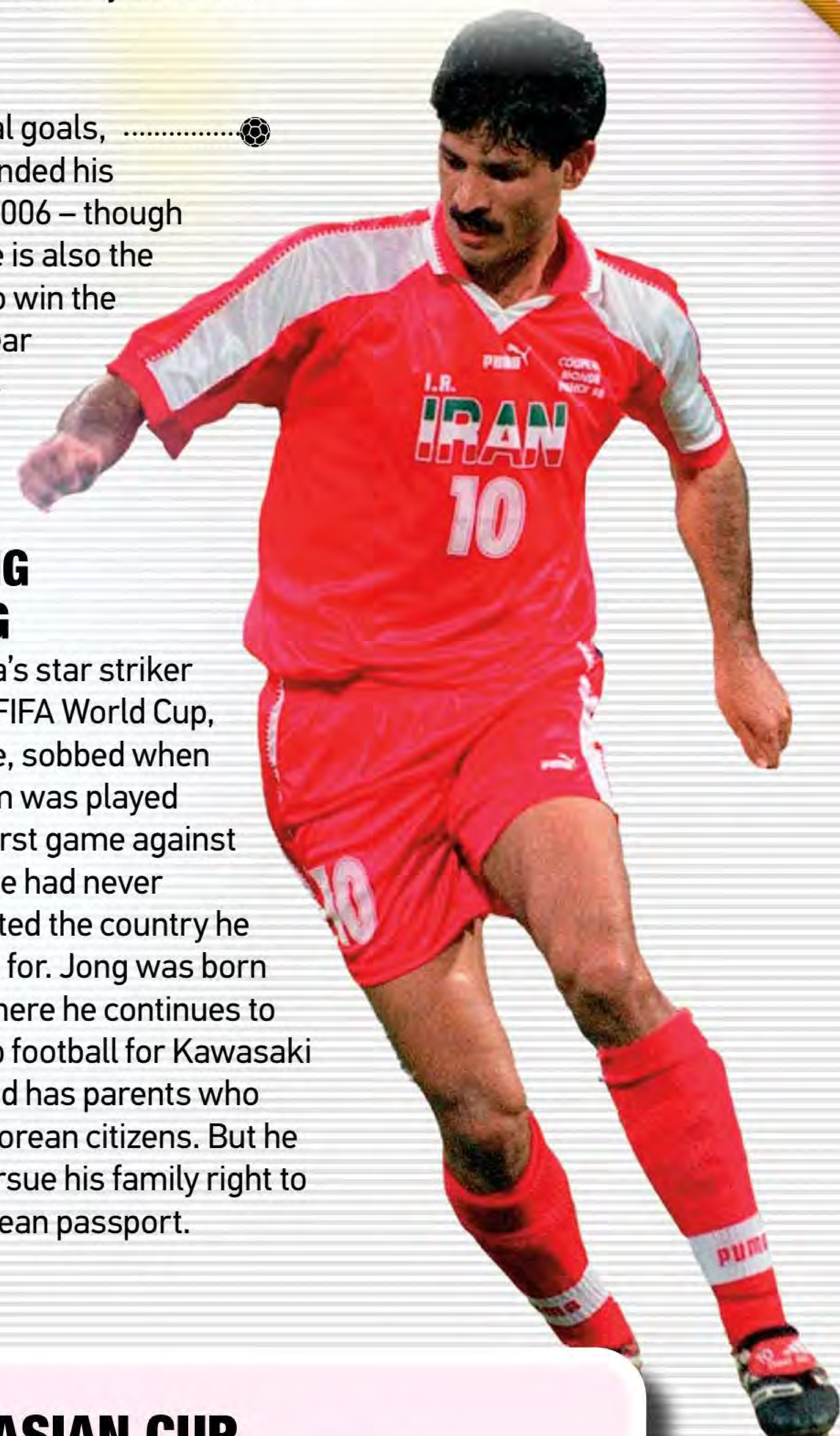
Saudi goalkeeper Mohamed Al-Deayea had to choose between football and handball as a youngster. He was persuaded by his elder brother Abdullah to pick football and he went on to make 181 appearances for his country: the first coming against Bangladesh in 1990 and the last against Belgium in May 2006. He also appeared in the FIFA World Cup finals tournaments of 1994, 1998 and 2002. He played his last finals game in a 3-0 defeat by the Republic of Ireland on 11 June 2002 and was recalled to the squad for the 2006 finals, although he did not play.

KUWAIT IN GOLD

Kuwait's one and only AFC Asian Cup triumph came in 1980, when they also hosted the tournament. They beat South Korea 3-0 in the final – having lost by the same scoreline, to the same opponents, in a first-round group game. Faisal Al-Dakhil was Kuwait's hero in the final, scoring two of their goals, his fourth and fifth of the tournament. He had also struck what proved to be the winner in a 2-1 semi-final victory over Iran.

HAPPY DAEI

Iran striker **Ali Daei** became the first footballer to score a century of international goals, when his four in a 7-0 defeat of Laos on 17 November 2004 took him to 102. He ended his career having scored 109 times for Iran in 149 internationals between 1993 and 2006 – though none of his goals came during FIFA World Cup appearances in 1998 and 2006. He is also the all-time leading scorer in the AFC Asian Cup, with 14 goals, despite failing ever to win the tournament. His time as national coach was less auspicious – he lasted only a year from March 2008 to March 2009 before being fired, as Iran struggled in qualifiers for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.



ONE OF BARCA'S BEST

The first Asian footballer ever to play for a European club was also, for almost a century, the all-time leading scorer for Spanish giants Barcelona, before being finally overtaken by Lionel Messi in March 2014. Paulino Alcantara, from the Philippines, scored 369 goals in 357 matches for the Catalan club between 1912 and 1927. He made his debut aged just 15, and remains Barcelona's youngest-ever first-team player. Alcantara was born in the Philippines, but had a Spanish father, and appeared in internationals for Catalonia, Spain and the Philippines, for whom he featured in a record 15-2 trouncing of Japan in 1917. Alcantara became a doctor after retiring from football at the age of 31, though he did briefly manage Spain in 1951.

THE JONG TURNING

North Korea's star striker at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Jong Tae-Se, sobbed when their anthem was played before the first game against Brazil, but he had never actually visited the country he was playing for. Jong was born in Japan, where he continues to play his club football for Kawasaki Frontale, and has parents who are South Korean citizens. But he chose to pursue his family right to a North Korean passport.

SURPRISE SEVEN



The top scorer in the Asian qualification campaign for the 2014 FIFA World Cup was Japan's eight-goal Shinji Okazaki, but he was followed by players from outside the Asian Confederation's traditional superpowers. Tied on seven goals apiece were Iraq's Younis Mahmoud, Jordan's Ahmad Hayel and Hassan Abdel-Fattah and Vietnam's **Le Cong Vinh**, whose strikes helped him to an all-time national record of 31. Jordan had never reached the fourth and final round of AFC qualifiers before and did so this time coached by Adnan Hamad, who had previously served five different stints as manager of his native Iraq.

AFC ASIAN CUP ALL-TIME TOP SCORERS

	Player	Goals
1	**Ali Daei** (Iran)	14
2	**Almoez Ali** (Qatar)	11
3	**Lee Dong-Gook** (South Korea)	10
4	**Naohiro Takahara** (Japan)	9
=	**Ali Mabkhout** (UAE)	9
=	**Akram Afif** (Qatar)	9
7	**Jassem Al-Huwaidi** (Kuwait)	8
=	**Younis Mahmoud** (Iraq)	8
9	**Sardar Azman** (Iran)	8
=	**Hossein Kalani** (Iran)	7



PAK STRIKE MAKES HISTORY

North Korea's **Pak Doo Ik** earned legendary status by scoring the goal that eliminated Italy from the 1966 FIFA World Cup finals. The shockwaves caused by the victory were comparable to those caused by the United States' 1-0 win over England in 1950. Pak netted the only goal of the game in the 42nd minute at Middlesbrough on 19 July. North Korea thus became the first Asian team to reach the quarter-finals. Pak, an army corporal, was promoted to sergeant after the victory and later became a gymnastics coach.

ASIAN FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR

Year	Player	Country
1988	Ahmed Radhi	Iraq
1989	Kim Joo-Sung	South Korea
1990	Kim Joo-Sung	South Korea
1991	Kim Joo-Sung	South Korea
1992	not awarded	
1993	Kazuyoshi Miura	Japan
1994	Saeed Owarain	Saudi Arabia
1995	Masami Ihara	Japan
1996	Khodadad Azizi	Iran
1997	Hidetoshi Nakata	Japan
1998	Hidetoshi Nakata	Japan
1999	Ali Daei	Iran
2000	Nawaf Al Temyat	Saudi Arabia
2001	Fan Zhiyi	China
2002	Shinji Ono	Japan
2003	Mehdi Mahdavikia	Iran
2004	Ali Karimi	Iran
2005	Hamad Al-Montashari	Saudi Arabia
2006	Khalfan Ibrahim	Qatar
2007	Yasser Al-Qahtani	Saudi Arabia
2008	Server Djeparov	Uzbekistan
2009	Yasuhito Endo	Japan
2010	Sasa Ognenovski	Australia
2011	Server Djeparov	Uzbekistan
2012	Lee Keun-Ho	South Korea
2013	Zheng Zhi	China
2014	Nasser Al-Shamrani	Saudi Arabia
2015	Ahmed Khalil	UAE
2016	Omar Abdulrahman	UAE
2017	Omar Kharbin	Syria
2018	Abdelkarim Hassan	Qatar
2019	Akram Afif	Qatar
2020	Son Heung-min	South Korea
2021	Son Heung-min	South Korea
2022	Son Heung-min	South Korea

SO NEAR AND SO FAR

The Asian Confederation's two-legged qualifying final for a place at the Brazil 2014 FIFA World Cup pitted two teams still waiting for their first finals appearance against each other: Uzbekistan and Jordan. The Uzbeks ended their final group level on points with automatic qualifiers South Korea but with an inferior goal difference of one, despite a 5-1 win over Qatar, when Basodir Nasimov equalized just 18 seconds after he came on as substitute. Jordan, with **Amer Shafi** heroic in goal, won 9-8 on penalties after two 1-1 draws but lost to Uruguay 5-0 on aggregate and missed out on the finals.

AFC ASIAN CUP-WINNING COACHES

1956 Lee Yoo-Hyung (South Korea)
1960 Wi Hye-Deok (South Korea)
1964 Gyula Mandl (Israel)
1968 Mahmoud Bayati (Iran)
1972 Mohammad Ranjbar (Iran)
1976 Heshmat Mohajerani (Iran)
1980 Carlos Alberto Parreira (Kuwait)
1984 Khalil Al-Zayani (Saudi Arabia)
1988 Carlos Alberto Parreira (Saudi Arabia)
1992 Hans Ooft (Japan)
1996 Nelo Vingada (Saudi Arabia)
2000 Philippe Troussier (Japan)
2004 Zico (Japan)
2007 Jorvan Vieira (Iraq)
2011 Alberto Zaccheroni (Japan)
2015 Ange Postecoglou (Australia)
2019 Felix Sanchez Bas (Qatar)
2023 Tintin Marquez (Qatar)

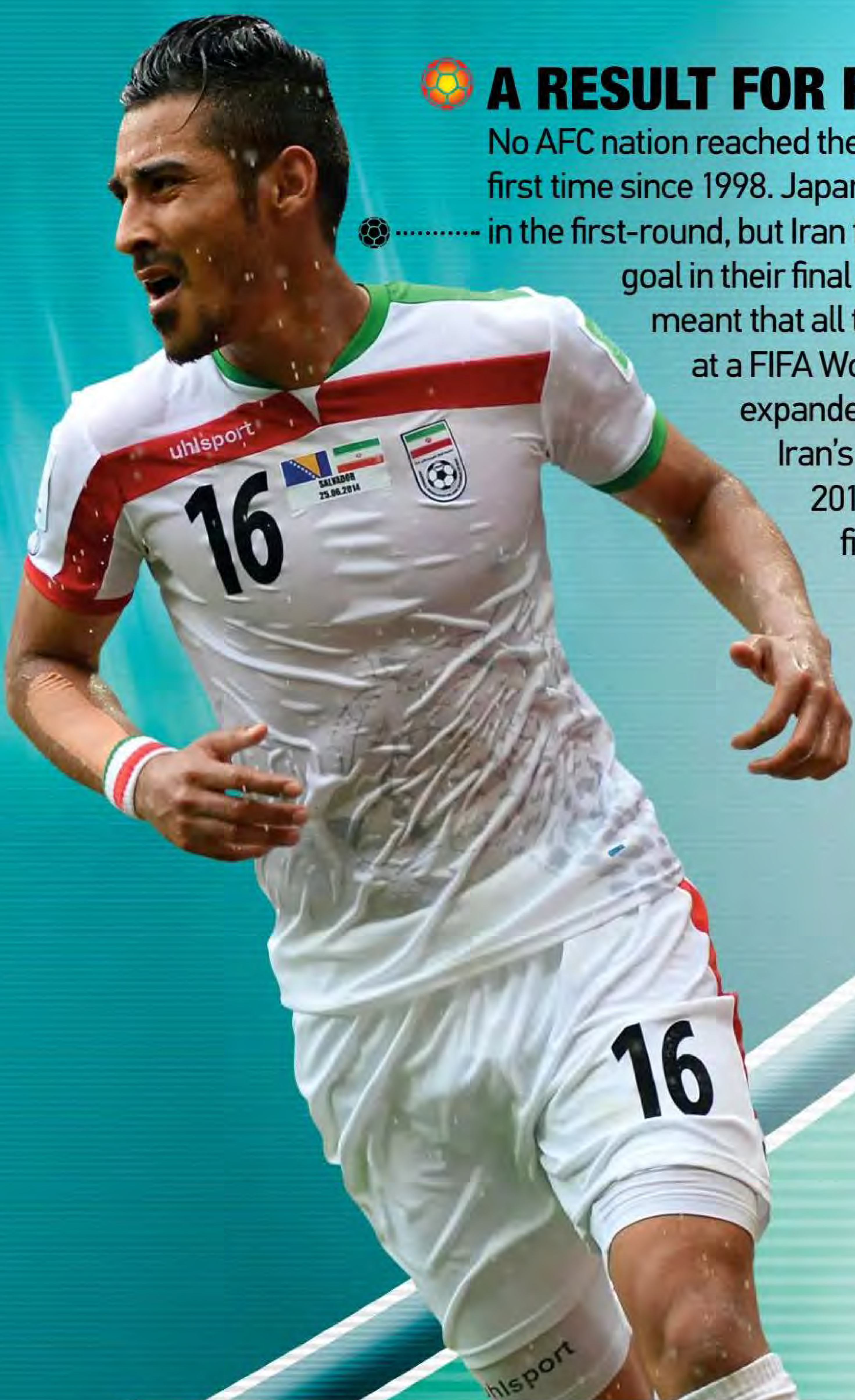
AL-JABER TO THE FORE

Sami Al-Jaber (born on 11 December 1972 in Riyadh) became only the second Asian player to appear in four FIFA World Cup finals tournaments when he started against Tunisia in Munich on 14 June 2006. He scored in a 2-2 draw, his third goal in nine appearances at the finals. Al-Jaber played only one game in 1998 before he was rushed to hospital with a burst appendix, which ruled him out of the competition. He became Saudi Arabia's record scorer, with 44 goals in 163 matches.

A LONG JOURNEY FOR A BEATING

The first Asian country to play in a FIFA World Cup finals was Indonesia, who played in France in 1938 as the Dutch East Indies. The tournament was a straight knockout and, on 5 June in Reims, Hungary beat them 6-0, with goals from Gyorgy Sarosi, Gyula Zsengeller (two each), Vilmos Kohut and Geza Toldi.





A RESULT FOR REZA

No AFC nation reached the 2014 FIFA World Cup knock-out stages for the first time since 1998. Japan, South Korea, Australia and Iran all went out in the first-round, but Iran forward **Reza Ghoochannejhad**'s consolation goal in their final game, a 3-1 loss to Bosnia-Herzegovina, meant that all the finalists had scored. This had not happened at a FIFA World Cup since 1998, when the tournament first expanded to 32 teams. Ghoochannejhad also scored Iran's goal in the 1-0 win against South Korea in June 2013 that ensured they finished at the top of their final Asian qualification group.

FOREIGN DOUBLE AGENT

Brazilian Carlos Alberto Parreira is the only coach to win the AFC Asian Cup twice – and he did so with two different countries. His Kuwait side won in 1980 and he got his hands on the trophy again eight years later, this time in charge of Saudi Arabia.

LOCAL COACHES MAKE THEIR MARK

No one has won the AFC Coach of the Year award more than once since it was introduced in 1994 – though Asians have claimed the prize every year except when it went to Japan's French boss Philipppe Troussier in 2000 and South Korea's Dutch manager Guus Hiddink two years later. The women's game was recognized with triumphs for China coach Ma Yuanan in 1996, North Korea's U-20 manager Choe Kwang-Sok ten years later and Japan's FIFA Women's World Cup-winning coach Norio Sasaki in 2011. The award 12 months later went to Kim Ho-Gon, in charge of South Korean club Ulsan Hyundai.

HIGHEST... AND LOWEST

The highest attendance for an Asian team in a home FIFA World Cup qualifier was the 130,000 who watched Iran draw 1-1 with Australia in the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, on 22 November 1997. The game was the first leg of a final playoff for the last place in the 1998 finals. Iran advanced on away goals after drawing the second leg 2-2 in Melbourne. The lowest attendance was the "crowd" of 20 that turned out for Turkmenistan's 1-0 win over Taiwan, played in Amman, Jordan, on 7 May 2001.

HUGE FOLLOWING FOR FOOTBALL IN CHINA

China's national team boasts a massive fan base – as was demonstrated when they reached the FIFA World Cup finals for the only time in 2002. Between their qualification on 19 October 2001 and their opening game of the finals against Costa Rica on 4 June 2002, an estimated 170 million new TV sets were sold throughout China. TV audiences for the team's three matches regularly topped 300 million, even though China lost all three matches and failed to score a goal.

ABOUT UZ

Uzbekistan's four most-capped internationals are still active: midfielders Timur Kapadze (119 appearances) and two-time Asian Footballer of the Year Server Djeparov (124), striker Alexander Geynrikh (98) and goalkeeper Ignatiy Nesterov (92). Striker **Maksim Shatskikh** leads the nation's scoring list, with 34 goals in 61 games. He has also enjoyed success in Ukraine with several sides including Dynamo Kiev – with whom he became the second Uzbek, after Mirjalol Qosimov, to score in UEFA club competitions. Qosimov, who struck 31 goals for his country, is now the national team coach.

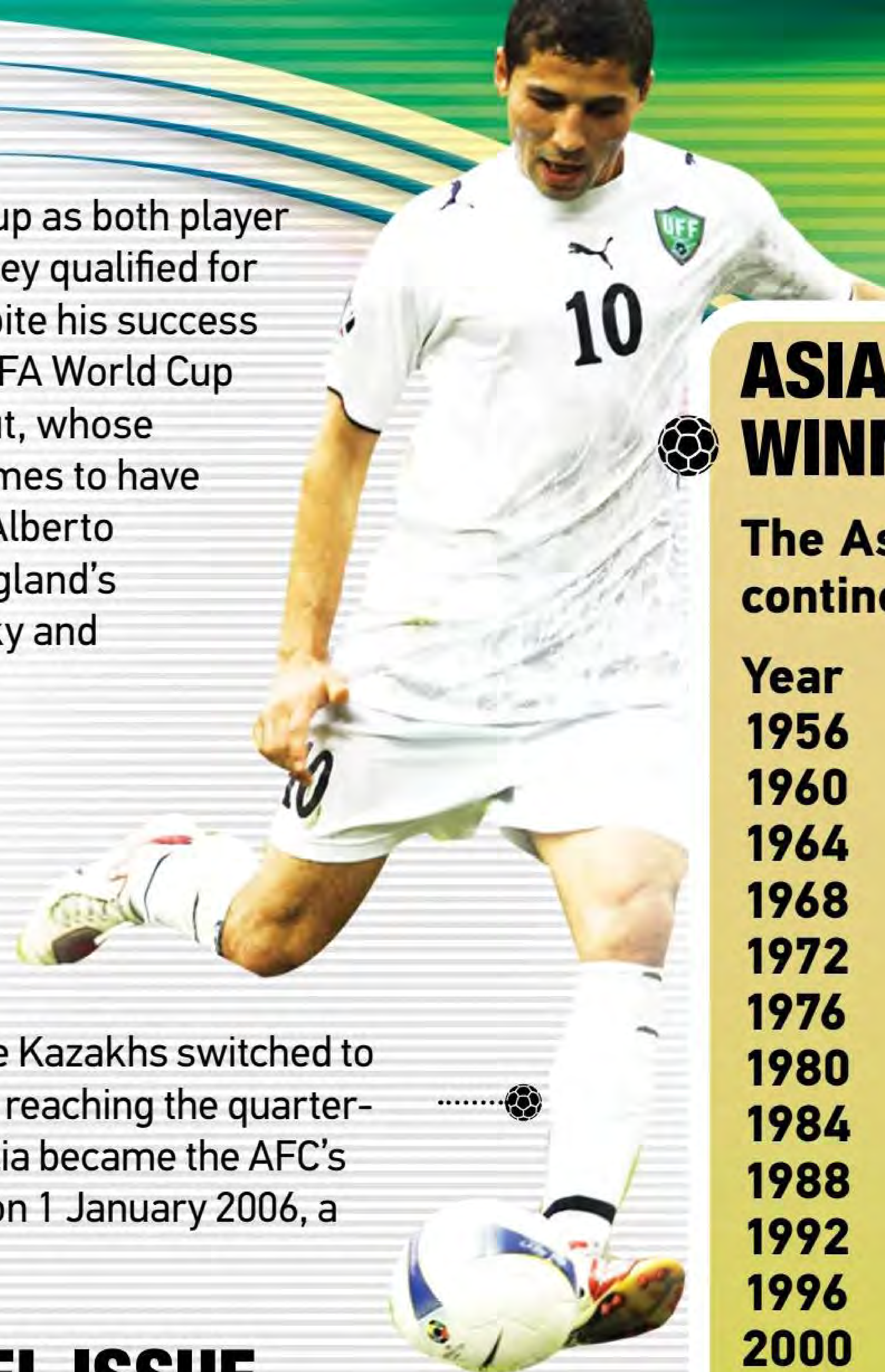


CHINA'S 4X4

Four teams carry the name of China. The China national team receives the most attention, but Hong Kong (a former British colony) and Macau (a former Portuguese colony) both retain their autonomous status for football – as Hong Kong China and Macau China respectively. Meanwhile, the independent island state of Taiwan competes in the FIFA World Cup and other competitions as Chinese Taipei.

UAE KO ZAGALLO

Brazilian great Mario Zagallo, who won the FIFA World Cup as both player and manager, coached the United Arab Emirates when they qualified for their one and only FIFA World Cup finals in 1990. But despite his success in the Asian qualifiers, he was sacked on the eve of the FIFA World Cup itself. Zagallo was replaced by Polish coach Bernard Blaut, whose UAE team lost all three matches at Italia 90. Other big names to have managed the UAE over the years include Brazil's Carlos Alberto Parreira (another FIFA World Cup winner with Brazil), England's Don Revie and Roy Hodgson, Ukraine's Valery Lobanovsky and Portugal's Carlos Queiroz.



ASIAN CUP WINNERS

The Asian Cup is Asia's continental championship

Year	Winners
1956	South Korea
1960	South Korea
1964	Israel
1968	Iran
1972	Iran
1976	Iran
1980	Kuwait
1984	Saudi Arabia
1988	Saudi Arabia
1992	Japan
1996	Saudi Arabia
2000	Japan
2004	Japan
2007	Iraq
2011	Japan
2015	Australia
2019	Qatar
2023	Qatar

SOVIET REPUBLICS FIND NEW HOME

The break-up of the former Soviet Union swelled the ranks of the Asian Confederation in the early 1990s. Former Soviet republics Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan all joined in 1994, though the Kazakhs switched to UEFA in 2002. **Uzbekistan** have been the most successful, reaching the quarter-finals in 2004 and 2007 and finishing fourth in 2011. Australia became the AFC's 46th – and newest – member, entering the Confederation on 1 January 2006, a few months after East Timor had become the 45th.

DOUBLE AGENT

Although North Korea's Kim Myong-Won usually plays as a striker, he was named as one of three goalkeepers in the country's 23-man squad for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. FIFA told North Korea he would only be able to play in goal, rather than outfield, though he failed to make it on to the pitch in any form during his country's three Group G matches.

THE ISRAEL ISSUE

Israel is, geographically, an Asian nation. It hosted – and won – the Asian Cup in 1964. But, over the years, many Asian confederation countries refused to play Israel on political grounds. When Israel reached the 1970 FIFA World Cup finals they came through a qualifying tournament involving two Asian nations – Japan and South Korea – and two from Oceania – Australia and New Zealand. In 1989, Israel topped the Oceania group, but lost a final play-off to Colombia for a place in the 1990 finals. They switched to the European zone qualifiers in 1992 and have been a full member of the European federation, UEFA, since 1994.

FROZEN OUT

Mongolia went 38 years without playing a single international between 1960 and 1998 and the country still barely stages any action, international or domestic, due to below-freezing conditions between October and June.



OCEANIA

Football in Oceania can claim some of the most eye-catching football statistics – though not necessarily in a way many there would welcome, especially the long-suffering goalkeepers from minnow islands on the end of cricket-style scorelines. The departure to the Asian Football Confederation of Australia, seeking more testing competition, was a morale blow – but benefited New Zealand out on the pitch. The finals tournament of the 2010 FIFA World Cup was the first to feature both Australia and New Zealand.



TOP CAPS: NEW ZEALAND

1	Ivan Vicelich	88
2	Chris Wood	76
3	Simon Elliott	69
4	Vaughan Coveney	64
5	Kosta Barbarouses	62
6	Ricki Herbert	61
7	Chris Jackson	60
8	Brian Turner	59
9	Duncan Cole	58
=	Steve Sumner	58
11	Shane Smeltz	57

KAREMBEU THE FIFA WORLD CUP WINNER

Christian Karembeu, born in New Caledonia, is the only FIFA World Cup winner to come from the Oceania region. He started for France in their 3-0 final victory over Brazil on 12 July 1998. The defensive midfielder had earlier begun against Denmark (group), Italy (quarter-finals) and Croatia (semi-finals). He played 53 times for France, scoring one goal, and was also a double European Champions League winner with Real Madrid in 1998 in 2000.

RYAN'S SISTER

New Zealand's captain **Ryan Nelsen** flew back from Blackburn in England to his native city of Christchurch in March 2011 after the city was devastated by an earthquake. Nelsen was worried for the safety of his family, especially his pregnant sister Stephanie Martin – but after being "knocked down" by the 6.3-magnitude quake, she safely gave birth to a healthy baby boy.



PAIA FIRE IN VAIN

No team from Oceania other than Australia or New Zealand has ever qualified for the men's football tournament at the Summer Olympics – but Fiji came close to reaching the 2012 event, only losing 1-0 to New Zealand in the final of the qualifying competition. The top scorers were the Solomon Islands, but they didn't make it out of their opening group. They recorded a best first-round goal difference of +12 – thanks to a 16-1 destruction of American Samoa, including seven goals by Ian Paia. However, defeats by Fiji and Vanuatu left them third in the four-team section.

TOP SCORERS: NEW ZEALAND

1	Chris Wood	34
2	Vaughan Coveney	29
3	Shane Smeltz	24
4	Steve Sumner	22
5	Brian Turner	21
6	Jock Newall	17
7	Chris Killen	16
=	Keith Nelson	16
9	Grant Turner	15
10	Michael McGarry	12
=	Darren McClennan	12
=	Wynton Rufer	12

RETURNING RICKI

Ricki Herbert is the only footballer from New Zealand to reach a FIFA World Cup twice – he played left-back at the 1982 tournament in Spain, then coached the country to their second World Cup appearance, in 2010. Qualification second time around came courtesy of a play-off win over Asian Football Confederation representatives Bahrain – though the New Zealand football authorities have been pondering whether to follow Australia in defecting from Oceania and joining the AFC. Herbert, born in Auckland in 1961, combined qualifying for the 2010 FIFA World Cup with coaching New Zealand-based club Wellington Phoenix, who play in Australia's A-League.

TEHAU ABOUT THAT?

The Pacific Island underdogs of Tahiti finally broke the stranglehold Australia and New Zealand had over the OFC Nations Cup by winning the tournament when it was held for the ninth time in 2012, following four previous triumphs for Australia and four for New Zealand. Tahiti scored 20 goals in their five games at the event in the Solomon Islands – 15 of which came from the Tehau family: brothers Lorenzo (five), Alvin and **Jonathan Tehau** (four each) and their cousin Teaonui (two). Steevy Chong Hue scored the only goal of the final, against New Caledonia, to give the team managed by Eddy Etaeta not only the trophy but a place at the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup in Brazil.



PIERRE'S PERFECT START

The very first goal of the 2010 FIFA World Cup was scored, in qualifying, by New Caledonia's Pierre Wajoka – the only strike of an August 2007 match against Tahiti, the country of his birth.

BAD LUCK OF THE DRAW

Despite featuring at only their second-ever FIFA World Cup – and their first since 1982 – New Zealand did not lose a game in South Africa in 2010. They drew all three first-round matches, against Slovakia, Italy and Paraguay. The three points were not enough to secure a top-two finish in Group F, but third-placed New Zealand did finish above defending world champions Italy. The only other three teams to have gone out despite going unbeaten in their three first-round group games were Scotland (1974), Cameroon(1982) and Belgium (1998).

LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE BANK

New Zealand went to the 2010 FIFA World Cup with four amateur players in their 23-man squad. Midfielder **Andy Barron**, who worked as an investment adviser at a bank in Wellington, even made it on to the pitch as a stoppage-time substitute against reigning world champions Italy.



'WORLD'S WORST TEAM' TO SILVER SCREEN

Nicky Salapu was in goal when American Samoa set an unwanted international record, losing 31-0 to Australia in April 2001 – two days after Australia had crushed Tonga 22-0. Passport problems had denied American Samoa some of their best players for the Australia game and they had to field three 15-year-olds in a side with an average age of 18. Salapu was also playing when American Samoa finally won their first competitive international, 2-1 against Tonga in November 2011 thanks to goals by Ramin Ott and Shamin Luani. This was followed by a 1-1 draw with the Cook Islands, during a 2014 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign during which American Samoa were managed by Dutch coach Thomas Rongen and followed by film crews making a documentary movie, *Next Goal Wins*. It was released in 2014 to widespread critical acclaim – including for Jaiyah Saelua, the world's first transgender international footballer. He was born biologically male but is from the Fa'afafine people, a traditional American Samoan group with both masculine and feminine traits and often described as 'third-gender'.

THE WHITE STUFF

New Zealand's national football team is known as the 'All-Whites' – not just a recognition of their kit colours, but also a counterpoint to the 'All-Blacks' nickname of the country's more famous and successful rugby union side.



CONCACAF

Teams from the Caribbean, Central and North America had a disappointing showing at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. While the USA missed out on their first FIFA World Cup since 1986, both Costa Rica and Panama went out in the group stages. Mexico were the only nation from the region to progress beyond the first round, reaching the last 16 before losing 2-0 to Brazil. However, the USA made up for their absence in Russia by beating Iran and drawing with Wales and England to reach the last 16 in Qatar.

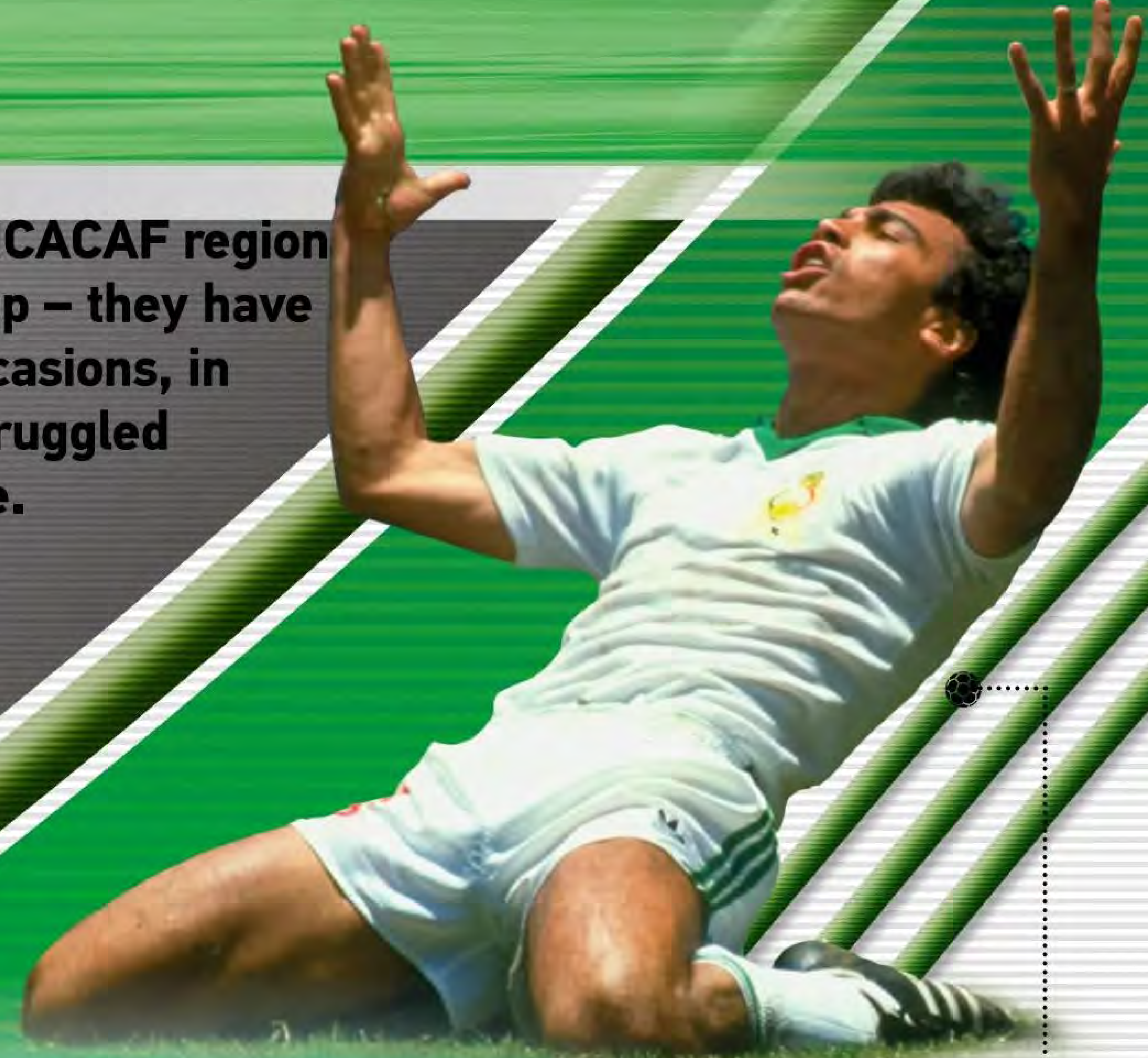


While they may have been the standout CONCACAF side in Russia in 2018, Mexico endured a difficult World Cup in Qatar, finishing third in Group C behind Argentina and Poland.


Chapulin
CHIHUAHUA

MEXICO

Mexico may well be the powerhouse of the CONCACAF region and are regular qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup – they have only failed to reach the tournament on three occasions, in 1934, 1974 and 1982 – but they have always struggled to impose themselves on the international stage. Two FIFA World Cup quarter-final appearances (both times as tournament hosts, in 1970 and 1986) represent their best performances to date. A football-mad nation expects more, and perhaps it will enjoy a better showing from Mexico when the country hosts the 2026 World Cup with the USA and Canada.



TOP SCORERS

1	Javier Hernandez	52
2	Jared Borghetti	46
3	Cuauhtemoc Blanco	38
4	Luis Hernandez	35
5	Carlos Hermosillo	34
=	Raul Jimenez	33
7	Enrique Borja	31
8	Luis Roberto Alves	30
9	Hugo Sanchez	29
10	Luis Garcia	28

VICTOR HUGO

Javier Hernandez may hold the record as Mexico's all-time leading scorer, but perhaps the country's most inspirational striker remains **Hugo Sanchez,** famed for his acrobatic bicycle-kick finishes and somersaulting celebrations. Sanchez played for Mexico at the 1978, 1986 and 1994 FIFA World Cups and would surely have done so had they qualified in 1982 and 1990. During spells in Spain with Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid he finished as La Liga's top scorer five years out of six between 1985 and 1990. He was less successful as Mexico coach from 2006 to 2008, the best result being third in the 2007 Copa America.

MAKING HIS MARQUEZ



Commanding centre-back **Rafael Marquez** made history in 2014 as the first player to captain his country at four consecutive FIFA World Cups. His four games in 2014 took him to 16 FIFA World Cup appearances, beyond Antonio Carbajal – whose 11 were spread across five not four tournaments. Marquez, who scored against Cameroon in 2014, having also registered in 2006 and 2010, is also the second Mexican to score at three different FIFA World Cups, after Cuauhtemoc Blanco.

PRECOCIOUS PEREZ



Mexico's youngest international remains midfielder **Luis Ernesto Perez**, who won the first of his 69 caps at the age of 17 years and 308 days, against El Salvador on 17 November 1998. Less impressive was his red card in Mexico's third first-round match against Portugal at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Hugo Sanchez was the nation's oldest player, 39 years and 251 days old for his final international, against Paraguay on 19 March 1998 – though this was a farewell game for Sanchez, four years after his previous Mexico appearance, and he was replaced in the first minute by Luis Garcia.

TOP CAPS

1	Andres Guardado	179
2	Claudio Suarez	177
3	Guillermo Ochoa	150
4	Rafael Marquez	147
5	Pavel Pardo	146
6	Gerardo Torrado	144
7	Hector Moreno	132
8	Jorge Campos	129
9	Carlos Salcido	123
10	Ramon Ramirez	119

LITTLE PEA FROM A POD

When Javier Hernandez appeared for Mexico against South Africa on 11 June 2010, he became the third generation of his family to play at a FIFA World Cup. Hernandez – nicknamed 'Chicharito', or 'Little Pea' – is the son of Javier Hernandez who reached the quarter-finals with Mexico in 1986 and the grandson of Tomas Balcazar, a member of the country's 1954 squad. Another Mexican pair were the first grandfather-grandson pairing to each play at the finals. Luis Perez represented Mexico in 1930 in Uruguay. His grandson Mario Perez played for Mexico, on home turf, 40 years later. Hernandez scored all three of Mexico's goals at the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup – in a 2-1 defeat to Italy and a 2-1 win over Japan – taking him to joint-third in his country's scoring ranks, alongside Carlos Hermosillo and Luis Hernandez. He has since become the country's all-time leading scorer with 52 goals in 109 appearances.



FAMILY SPLIT

Winger **Giovani dos Santos** was distraught when Mexico's 30-man preliminary squad was reduced to 23 for the 2010 FIFA World Cup – though not for the obvious reason. He actually made the cut, and played in all four of Mexico's matches, but his brother Jonathan dos Santos was left out by coach Javier Aguirre. Gio was again the only brother to make the cut in 2014, when he was among Mexico's most impressive performers and looked like putting them through to the quarter-finals with a stunning volley against the Netherlands – only for his side to concede twice in the closing moments.



MEXICO BEATS EARTHQUAKE

Mexico stepped in to host the 1986 FIFA World Cup finals after the original choice, Colombia, pulled out in November 1982. FIFA chose Mexico as the replacement venue because of its stadiums and infrastructure, still in place from the 1970 finals. The governing body turned down rival bids from Canada and the United States. Mexico had to work overtime to be ready for the finals, after the earthquake of 19 September 1985, which killed an estimated 10,000 people in central Mexico and destroyed many buildings across Mexico City.

SUAREZ IS NUMBER TWO ALL-TIME

Until he was eclipsed by Andres Guardado in 2022, nobody had played more times for Mexico than **Claudio Suarez**, who made 177 appearances and scored seven goals. Nicknamed "The Emperor", he played in all of Mexico's four games at the 1994 and the 1998 FIFA World Cups but had to miss the 2002 finals after breaking his leg.

ROSAS NETS HISTORIC PENALTY

Mexico's Manuel Rosas scored the first penalty ever awarded in the FIFA World Cup finals when he converted a 42nd-minute spot-kick in his country's match against Argentina in 1930. Rosas scored again in the 65th minute, but it was too little too late for the Mexicans: they crashed to a 6-3 defeat.

SO NEAR, SO FAR

Mexico have proved to be experts at getting out of the first round at the FIFA World Cup – but, in recent years thus far and no further. They have now gone out at the round of 16 stage six tournaments in a row, the latest their last-gasp 2-1 defeat to the Netherlands in Fortaleza in 2014. Their manager in 2014 was the excitable **Miguel Herrera**, whose extravagant touchline antics caught the eye almost as compellingly as the on-pitch action. Herrera, who played 14 times for Mexico in 1993 and 1994, took charge in October 2013 – the country's fourth different coach within the space of a month, at a time when qualification for Brazil 2014 had seemed unlikely. But he guided the team into the finals, after beating New Zealand 9-3 in a playoff.



UNITED STATES

Some of football's biggest names – from Pele to David Beckham – have graced the United States' domestic leagues over the years, and the country is one of only 15 nations to have had the honour of hosting a FIFA World Cup, but it is still a minority sport in the world's most powerful country. However, following a series of impressive performances on the world stage, especially at the Brazil 2014 World Cup, there has been a huge upsurge in support, and despite missing out on the 2018 edition, they reached the last 16 in Qatar and will co-host the tournament in 2026.





TOP CAPS

1	Cobi Jones	164
2	Landon Donovan	157
3	Michael Bradley	151
4	Clint Dempsey	141
5	Jeff Agoos	134
6	Marcelo Balboa	127
7	DaMarcus Beasley	126
8	Tim Howard	121
9	Jozy Altidore	115
10	Claudio Reyna	112

ALTIDORE OPENS THE FLOODGATES

Jozy Altidore became the United States' youngest scorer of an international hat-trick in a 3-0 victory over Trinidad and Tobago on 1 April 2009, aged 19 years and 146 days. But he endured a 15-month barren spell between November 2011 and June 2013, when he scored the opener in a 4-3 defeat of Germany in a Washington DC friendly marking America's Centennial. He then scored against Jamaica, Panama and Honduras to equal a national record of scoring four games in a row, joining William Lubb, Eric Wynalda, Eddie Johnson, **Brian McBride** and Landon Donovan. Altidore's scoring spree came in a 2012–13 season in which he also set a USA record for goals in a European club league, with 31 for Dutch club AZ Alkmaar. Sadly his 2014 FIFA World Cup was ended by a hamstring injury 23 minutes into the opening game against Ghana.

CALIGIURI'S SHOT MAKES HISTORY

The USA's FIFA World Cup qualifying win in Trinidad, on 19 November 1989, is regarded as a turning point in the country's football history. The team included just one full-time professional, Paul Caligiuri, of (West) German second division club Meppen. He scored the only goal of the game with a looping shot after 31 minutes to take the USA to their first finals for 40 years. Trinidad's goalkeeper, Michael Maurice, claimed to have been blinded by the sun, but the win raised the profile of the USA team hugely, despite a first-round elimination in the 1990 FIFA World Cup.

LANDON HOPE AND GLORY

The USA's all-time joint leading scorer **Landon Donovan** was the undoubted star of their 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign. He scored three goals in four matches, including a stoppage-time winner against Algeria that meant his side finished top of Group C. His four displays at the tournament meant he featured in 12 FIFA World Cup matches for the USA, one ahead of compatriots Earnie Stewart, Cobi Jones and DaMarcus Beasley. His successful penalty in a second-round defeat to Ghana also made him the USA's all-time top scorer in the competition, with five goals – one more than 1930 hat-trick hero Bert Patenaude. He, Jozy Altidore, Clint Dempsey and Jesus Ferreira are the only men to score more than one hat-trick for the USA, with Donovan hitting four goals against Cuba in July 2003 then trebles versus Ecuador in March 2007 and Scotland in May 2012. Twelve others have scored individual hat-tricks.



HIGH-POWERED BACKING

Former US president Barack Obama was among the millions of Americans who enthused over the 2014 FIFA World Cup like never before. Many millions tuned in to watch the games in their homes – it was estimated 25 million for the team's 2-2 draw with Portugal in the group stage – and millions more watched in bars and clubs. Team USA also faced Joachim Low's Germany in the first round – pitting coach Jurgen Klinsmann against his native land, the country he had led at the 2006 FIFA World Cup with Low as his assistant. Low's men won 1-0 to top Group G, with the USA second. Then some 28,000 fans crowded into Chicago's Soldier Field for big-screen coverage of the USA's second-round match against Belgium. They lost, bravely, 2-1 after extra-time – despite goalkeeper Tim Howard making a FIFA World Cup record 16 saves.

MILITARY SUB

Berlin-born defender **John Brooks**, who represented both the USA and Germany at U20s level, opted to play full international football for the American homeland of his armed forces-serving parents. His first goal for his country proved decisive in their first 2014 FIFA World Cup game against Ghana, securing a 2-1 victory in the 86th minute at Natal's Estadio das Dunas. Brooks also became the first USA substitute to score in the FIFA World Cup, after replacing Matt Besler for the second half.





PAYING HIS DEUCE

Clint Dempsey got the USA's 2014 FIFA World Cup off to the ideal start by scoring against Ghana after just 30 seconds. This was not only the fifth fastest goal in the tournament's history but also made him the first man to score for the USA at three different FIFA World Cups. The striker nicknamed "Deuce" is currently joint top of the nation's international scoring records alongside Landon Donovan. Donovan, having played at the 2002, 2006 and 2010 finals, was contentiously left out of the 2014 squad by manager Jurgen Klinsmann – allowing DaMarcus Beasley to become the first USA player to appear in four FIFA World Cup finals.

TOP SCORERS

1	Landon Donovan	57
=	Clint Dempsey	57
3	Jozy Altidore	42
4	Eric Wynalda	34
5	Christian Pulisic	31
6	Brian McBride	30
7	Joe-Max Moore	24
8	Bruce Murray	21
9	Eddie Johnson	19
10	DaMarcus Beasley	17
=	Earnie Stewart	17
=	Michael Bradley	17

ENGLAND STUNNED BY GAETJENS

The USA's 1-0 win over England on 29 June 1950 ranks among the biggest surprises in FIFA World Cup history. England, along with hosts Brazil, were joint favourites to win the trophy. The USA had lost their last seven matches, scoring just two goals. Joe Gaetjens scored the only goal, in the 37th minute, diving to head Walter Bahr's cross past goalkeeper Bert Williams. England dominated the game, but USA keeper Frank Borghi made save after save. Defeats by Chile and Spain eliminated the USA at the group stage, but their victory over England remains the greatest result in the country's football history.

'OLD MAN' HAHNEMANN

Goalkeeper Marcus Hahnemann became the USA's oldest international when he faced Paraguay on 29 March 2011 at the age of 38 years and 286 days. That was the last of his nine caps, testament to the USA's strength in depth when it comes to goalkeepers in recent years – Kasey Keller (101 caps), Tim Howard (90) and Brad Friedel (82) were among the competition. Hahnemann's debut was in 1994, followed by two more appearances that year, but he then had to wait until 2004 for his next international action.



KEEPING UP WITH JONES

His dreadlocked hair helped catch the attention, but **Cobi Jones**'s raiding runs down the wing also made him one of the host country's most high-profile performers at the 1994 FIFA World Cup. Jones went on to become the USA's most-capped player, with 164 international appearances between 1992 and 2004. When he finally retired from all forms of the game in 2007, his number 13 shirt was officially "retired" by the Los Angeles Galaxy – the first time a Major League Soccer club had honoured a player in such a way. Jones had been with the Galaxy since the MLS was launched in 1996 and later served the club as assistant coach and caretaker manager.

CONCACAF OTHER TEAMS

Mexico and the United States (with 28 FIFA World Cup finals appearances between them) are clearly the powerhouses of the CONCACAF region, which takes in North and Central America and the Caribbean. But the USA didn't even make the cut for the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Instead Panama reached their first-ever finals, going out in the first round following three defeats along with Costa Rica, who were playing at their fifth tournament.



KEYLOR IS KEY

Costa Rica made their FIFA World Cup finals debut in 1990, and goalkeeper Luis Gabelo Conejo shared the best goalkeeper award with Argentina's Sergio Goycochea as his displays helped his team reach the knock-out stages. "Los Ticos" did even better in 2014, and while goalscorers **Joel Campbell** and Bryan Ruiz impressed, again a goalkeeper was crucial: **Keylor Navas** was named man of the match four times in five games. Costa Rica went to the quarter-finals, where the Netherlands beat them, but only on penalties. They had topped the so-called "Group Of Death" by beating two former FIFA World Cup winners, Uruguay and Italy, and drawing with another, England. Navas conceded only two goals at the finals and his penalty shoot-out save from Theofanis Gekas helped his side past Greece in the second-round. Costa Rica became only the second CONCACAF side, after Mexico in 1986, to go out without losing a game in regulation-time.



PAVON... AND ON... AND ON

Striker **Carlos Pavon**, with 101, is one of six Honduras players to win 100 caps. The others are defender Maynor Figueroa (181), midfielder Amado Guevara (138), goalkeeper Noel Valladares (135), winger Oscar Garcia (134) and defender Emilio Izaguirre (111). Guevara, in 2010, and Valladares, in 2014, also captained Honduras in the FIFA World Cup finals. Pavon scored seven goals in the 2010 qualifying tournament as Honduras reached their first FIFA World Cup finals since 1982. But then aged 36, he played just 60 minutes in the finals. Nicknamed "The Shadow", Pavon, who scored a record 57 times for his country, played club football in seven countries before he retired in 2013: Honduras, Mexico, Spain, Italy, Colombia, Guatemala and the USA.

WAITING GAMES

Patience is the watchword for many of Central America's smaller nations when it comes to footballing achievement – or even participation. International matches are rare in Montserrat due to the risk of volcanic activity on the 5,000-population Caribbean island. The team has played just 15 international matches in the 21st century, none between November 2004 and March 2008. More positively, Puerto Rico finally ended a 14-year wait for a win when they beat Bermuda 2-0 in January 2008, before reaching the second round of CONCACAF's qualifiers for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The British Virgin Islands were eliminated from those qualifiers despite not losing a game – their two-legged first-round tie against the Bahamas ended 5-5 on aggregate, with the British Virgin Islands knocked out on away goals.

COSTA RICA WIN WITHOUT A CROWD

The lowest-ever attendance for a CONCACAF FIFA World Cup qualifier was for the Costa Rica–Panama game on 26 March 2005. FIFA ordered the game, staged at the Saprissa Stadium in San Jose, to be played behind closed doors after missiles were thrown at visiting players and the match officials when Mexico won there 2-1 on 9 February. The game was known as "the ghost match". Costa Rica beat Panama 2-1 thanks to a **Roy Myrie** goal in the first minute of stoppage time.





CONCACAF TEAMS IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS

Appearances made by teams from the CONCACAF region at the FIFA World Cup finals

	Team	Appearances
1	Mexico	17
2	US	11
3	Costa Rica	6
4	Honduras	3
5	El Salvador	2
=	Canada	2
7	Cuba	1
=	Haiti	1
=	Jamaica	1
=	Trinidad & Tobago	1
=	Panama	1

CELSO LIKE HIS FATHER

Costa Rica playmaker Celso Borges was delighted, in 2014, to emulate his father by reaching the knock-out stages of the FIFA World Cup. He actually went one better as he scored the first penalty of Los Ticos' 5-3 shoot-out defeat of Greece in the second round. His Brazilian-born father, Alexandre Borges Guimares, played at the 1990 FIFA World Cup and set up the late winner scored by Hernan Medford against Sweden to take the FIFA World Cup finals debutants beyond the first round. The man affectionately known as "Guima" was Costa Rica's coach at both the 2002 and 2006 FIFA World Cup finals, but they failed to go beyond the group stage on either occasion.

REGGAE BOYZ STEP UP

In 1998, Jamaica became the first team from the English-speaking Caribbean to reach the FIFA World Cup finals. The "Reggae Boyz", as they were nicknamed, included several players based in England. They were eliminated at the group stage, despite beating Japan 2-1 in their final game thanks to two goals by **Theodore Whitmore**. They had earlier lost 3-1 to Croatia and 5-0 against Argentina.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Honduras became the first team to field not one, not two, but three siblings at a FIFA World Cup, when they picked defender Johnny, midfielder Wilson and striker Jerry Palacios in the 2010 squad. Stoke City defensive midfielder Wilson Palacios was perhaps the most famous and acclaimed player in the first Honduras side to reach a FIFA World Cup in 28 years. Like the 1982 side, though, Reinaldo Rueda's men went three games without a win. An older brother, Milton Palacios, played 14 times as a defender for Honduras between 2003 and 2006. Both Jerry and Wilson made it into the 2014 FIFA World Cup squad, but it was not a happy time, especially for Wilson, who was sent off in the opener against France, and Honduras lost all three matches, but did at least score in the defeat against Ecuador.



CUBA SHOW THE WAY

In 1938, Cuba became the first island state of the CONCACAF region to reach the FIFA World Cup quarter-finals. They drew 3-3 with Romania after extra-time in the first round, then won the replay 2-1 with goals by Hector Socorro and Carlos Oliveira after trailing at half-time. They were thrashed 8-0 by Sweden in the last eight. Haiti were the next Caribbean island to play in the finals, in 1974. They lost all three group games, 3-1 to Italy, 7-0 against Poland and 4-1 to Argentina.

RUIZ ON TARGETS

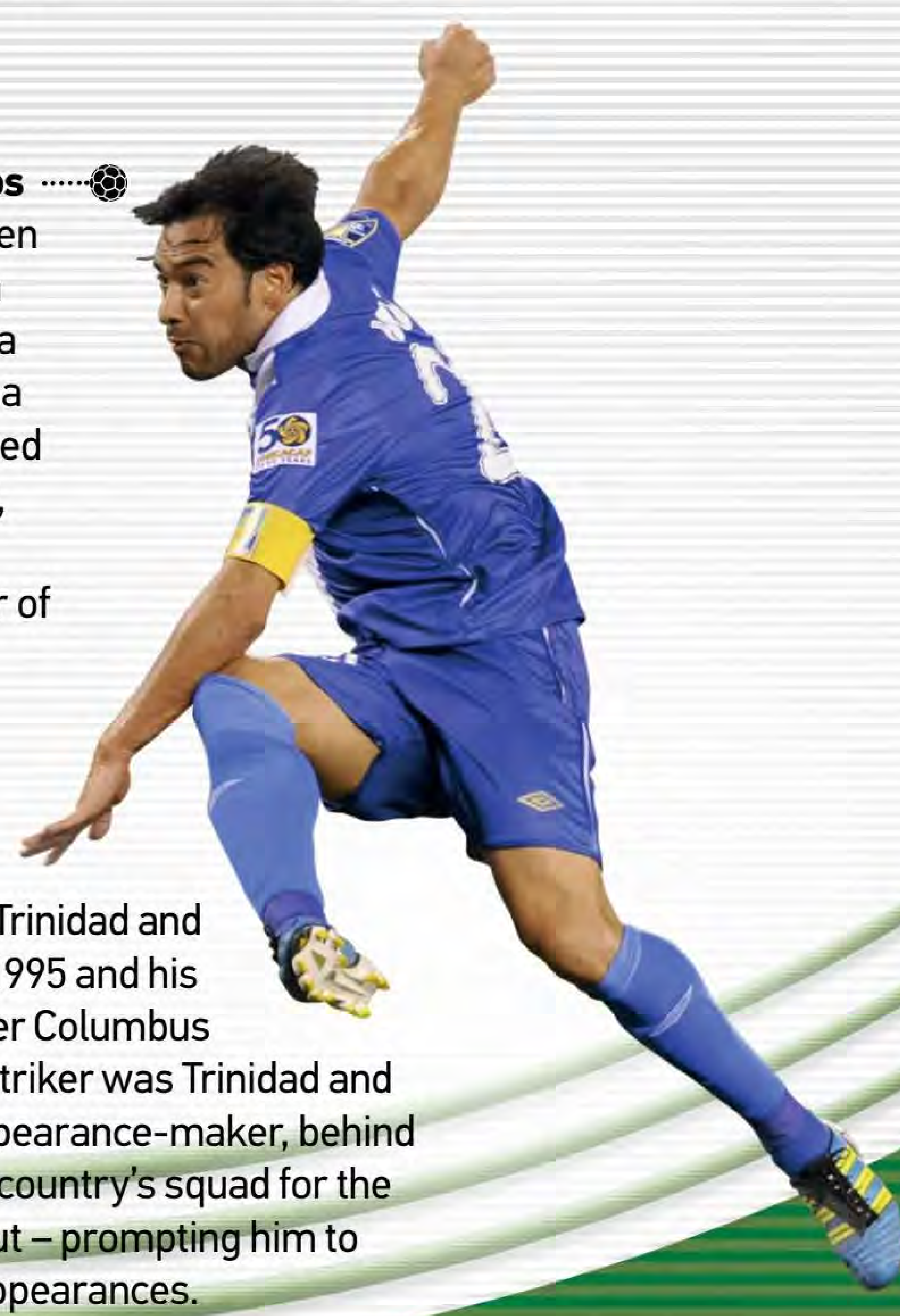
Guatemala's all-time leading scorer **Carlos Ruiz** had double cause for celebration when scoring in their 3-3 draw with Paraguay in August 2012: the game gave him not only a century of international appearances, but a half-century of goals. The player nicknamed "Pescado", or "Fish", briefly retired in 2012, before returning to continue his scoring exploits, becoming the highest goalscorer of all-time in World Cup qualifiers.

STERN OPPOSITION

Only 18 internationals have claimed more goals than the 70 in 115 matches scored by Trinidad and Tobago's **Stern John** between his debut in 1995 and his final game for his country in 2011. The former Columbus Crew, Nottingham Forest and Sunderland striker was Trinidad and Tobago's top scorer and second-highest appearance-maker, behind midfielder Angus Eve. John was part of the country's squad for the 2006 FIFA World Cup, though Eve missed out – prompting him to retire from international football after 115 appearances.

TRINIDAD'S FIRST TIME

Trinidad & Tobago reached the FIFA World Cup finals for the first time in 2006 after a marathon qualifying competition that ended with their 1-0 play-off victory in Bahrain. The team, nicknamed the "Socca Warriors", held Sweden 0-0 in their opening game, but lost 2-0 to England and 2-0 to Paraguay.





Get great savings when you buy direct from us

1000s of great titles, many not available anywhere else

World-wide delivery and super-safe ordering

THE ULTIMATE BOOK OF FOOTBALL STATS & RECORDS

WORLD FOOTBALL ANNUAL



TOP GOALSCORERS

Read about the players who have lit up the world's premier international tournament



THE COUNTRIES

From Argentina to Zimbabwe, get to know each nation's biggest stars and record holders



TEAM RECORDS

Discover the most successful teams from almost a century of World Cup history



WOMEN'S RECORDS

Meet the pioneers who shaped women's international football